

ISRAEL

THE CORNHUSKERS

THE CORNHUSKERS
NEBRASKA FOOTBALL



NEBRASKA FOOTBALL

DAVID ISRAEL

796
Is

REGINERY

THE CORNHUSKERS

Nebraska Football

DAVID ISRAEL

The history of football at the University of Nebraska is one of auspicious beginnings, early triumphs, and consistent successes. From its first intercollegiate game, on Thanksgiving Day, 1890, Nebraska has been a consistently menacing opponent. In 85 years Husker teams have compiled a record of 491 victories, 249 losses, and 38 ties.

Here, in one book, is the complete story of football at Nebraska, beginning with the first coaches and culminating with the triumphs of the Devaney years and the promises of today. Here is the story of:

- the greatest stars and All-Americans, from Flippin, Halligan, Chamberlin, and Weir to Tagge, Kinney, Rodgers, Glover, and Jacobson
- the greatest and most colorful coaches, from Bummy Booth and Jumbo Stiehm through Bob Devaney and Tom Osborne
- the most memorable and important games against traditional rivals Kansas, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Notre Dame, and Oklahoma
- the undefeated seasons and the national championship teams
- the game Bob Devaney has called the "greatest football game ever played"—Nebraska vs. Oklahoma, Thanksgiving Day, 1971.

(continued on back flap)

**THE
CORNHUSKERS
NEBRASKA FOOTBALL
DAVID ISRAEL**

The Illustrated College Football Series
General Editor: George Vass

**HENRY REGNERY COMPANY
CHICAGO**

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Israel, David.

The Cornhuskers.

(The Illustrated college football series)

1. Nebraska. University—Football. 2. Football—History. I. Title.

GV958.N4187 1975 796.33'263 75-13246

ISBN 0-8092-8180-5

Photographs courtesy of the University
of Nebraska Sports Information Office

Copyright © 1975 by David Israel

All rights reserved

Published by Henry Regnery Company

180 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60601

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 75-13246

International Standard Book Number: 0-8092-8180-5

Published simultaneously in Canada by

Fitzhenry & Whiteside Limited

150 Lesmill Road

Don Mills, Ontario M3B 2T5

Canada

Contents

	Introduction: Saturday's America	7
1	The Game of the Century	15
2	Genesis and First Success	33
3	Going Big Time	49
4	The Torch Flickers	59
5	The Golden Age and a New Stage	63
6	Biblical Times	81
7	Tough Guys Don't Always Finish First	101
8	The First Bowl	109
9	The Futile Forties	119
10	One Tumultuous Decade B. D.	129
11	The Right Man	145
12	The Devaney Era	153
13	Osborne and the Future	207
	<i>Appendix: Nebraska's Annual Won-Lost Record</i>	223



Memorial Stadium, Lincoln, Nebraska

Introduction: Saturday's America

I can't say I wasn't warned. They were friends from North Platte and Omaha, and they told me all about it before I left for the airport and my first football weekend at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.

We had all gone to a Big Ten school, and I was sure that Lincoln couldn't be any different from Columbus or Ann Arbor or West Lafayette or South Bend. There is tradition at all those places. They reek of tradition. And there is that madness that has been called Saturday's America. The madness of miles of Winnebagos parked end-to-end and tailgate parties that start at ten in the morning, adjourn a half-hour before kick off, and pick right back up where they left off until sundown. There is the madness everywhere. At Ohio State, at Michigan, at Purdue, and, of course, at Notre Dame, where, they tell me, the whole business was really invented.

But they warned me about it, those friends did. They told me Columbus, Ann Arbor, South Bend were all minor league compared to Lincoln. I insisted that couldn't be; they insisted I

8 THE CORNHUSKERS

would see football madness like I had never seen it before. And they told me that this madness occurred as a matter of course. They told me it didn't take a special event such as Oklahoma-Texas. If the Cornhuskers were playing Yankton College, the madness would be just the same in Lincoln as if the opponent were Oklahoma.

So when Wednesday came, I trundled off to the airport, forewarned but disbelieving.

The plane came down in Lincoln in early afternoon. I checked into my room in the Cornhusker Hotel, and then went for a walk in downtown Lincoln. I started to believe.

It was everywhere. Football. Coach Bob Devaney's face was as omnipresent as Mao's face in Peking. There were signs on top of all the taxicabs advertising Devaney's radio show. There were signs in all the store windows telling his team to please be Number One again. You couldn't walk three steps without seeing a "Go Big Red" poster somewhere. My friends were right; South Bend was never like this — could never even hope to be like this.

After an hour in town I was already awestruck by the immensity of the whole great business of higher scoring as practiced right here in little Lincoln.

Passing three blocks of cheerleading window displays, I stopped at the Miller-Paine department store. To be sure, it did its full share of cheerleading, too. As I walked in, the first counter was filled with Nebraska Big Red sweatshirts. Another counter displayed red cardigan Big Red sweaters. There were Big Red Stetsons. Big Red T-shirts. Big Red golf shirts. Big Red shorts. Big Red windbreakers. Big Red dinnerware. Big Red glasses. Most prominently displayed was an album of the top moments in Big Red history. The excursion through town led to the campus and finally football practice, then I retraced my steps back to the hotel.

At dinner in the hotel restaurant the hostess showed me to a table, and we started to talk. There wasn't much for her to do. The Cornhusker, except for the lucrative football weekends, is



Bob Devaney

10 THE CORNHUSKERS

Lincoln's great brick salesmen's hotel. It is a functional place that caters to businessmen and the political types that populate the city when the Unicameral's in session. During the week, its pseudo-elegant lobby is almost always vacant.

The hostess said her name was Debbie, I think. She wasn't a native. She was from Connecticut, born and bred in the green suburbs of New York City, a creature of Long Island Sound. She had come to Lincoln from New England only a year before with her husband, who was a graduate student at the university. She worked nights and Saturdays. I asked about the Saturdays.

She said she wasn't a football fan. Loathed it, in fact. Didn't understand, and didn't really care. Seemed silly, she said, going out there to wreck your body, and all for what? She knew she didn't belong in Lincoln with that attitude, not at this point, anyway. She was an alien in the land of Saturday's America.

"You wouldn't believe what it's like around here when there's a home football game," she said. "On Friday night and Saturday morning and then again on Saturday night, this town is so crowded you can't even move. It's as hard to find a parking space here as it is in Times Square.

"But on Saturday afternoon it's like a ghost town. No one is in the streets. You don't see any cars. If it's windy out, you can actually see the sagebrush blowing down the streets. I swear to God you do. You wouldn't believe it."

I told her that by the time I left Sunday morning I thought I would believe it very much.

The Red Sea of people started to arrive in town just a couple of hours after work let out Friday evening. By nine o'clock, the place was inundated with men in red blazers. Proud men with tough weather-beaten faces, whose lives were devoted to Nebraska. And their wives, clad in countless varieties of red and white dresses. Once the leaves fell, I was sure, red, white, and gray would be the only colors you would find in Lincoln.

Saturday morning, they all awoke early. By nine o'clock the Cornhusker's lobby was again a crush of weather-beaten

faces and red and white mixing into an indistinct pink. The din was of the sort that you hear in the most publicized big celebrity restaurants in the large cities of America. You didn't have to tune in to know there was only one subject being discussed. Football.

On the elevator down to the lobby I met a young man in a red blazer. He said he was from Scottsbluff and that he and his folks had driven in for the game. I mentioned that that was a pretty long ride. He replied that it was somewhere between 400 and 500 miles and they did it every weekend. It was nothing. Just part of life.

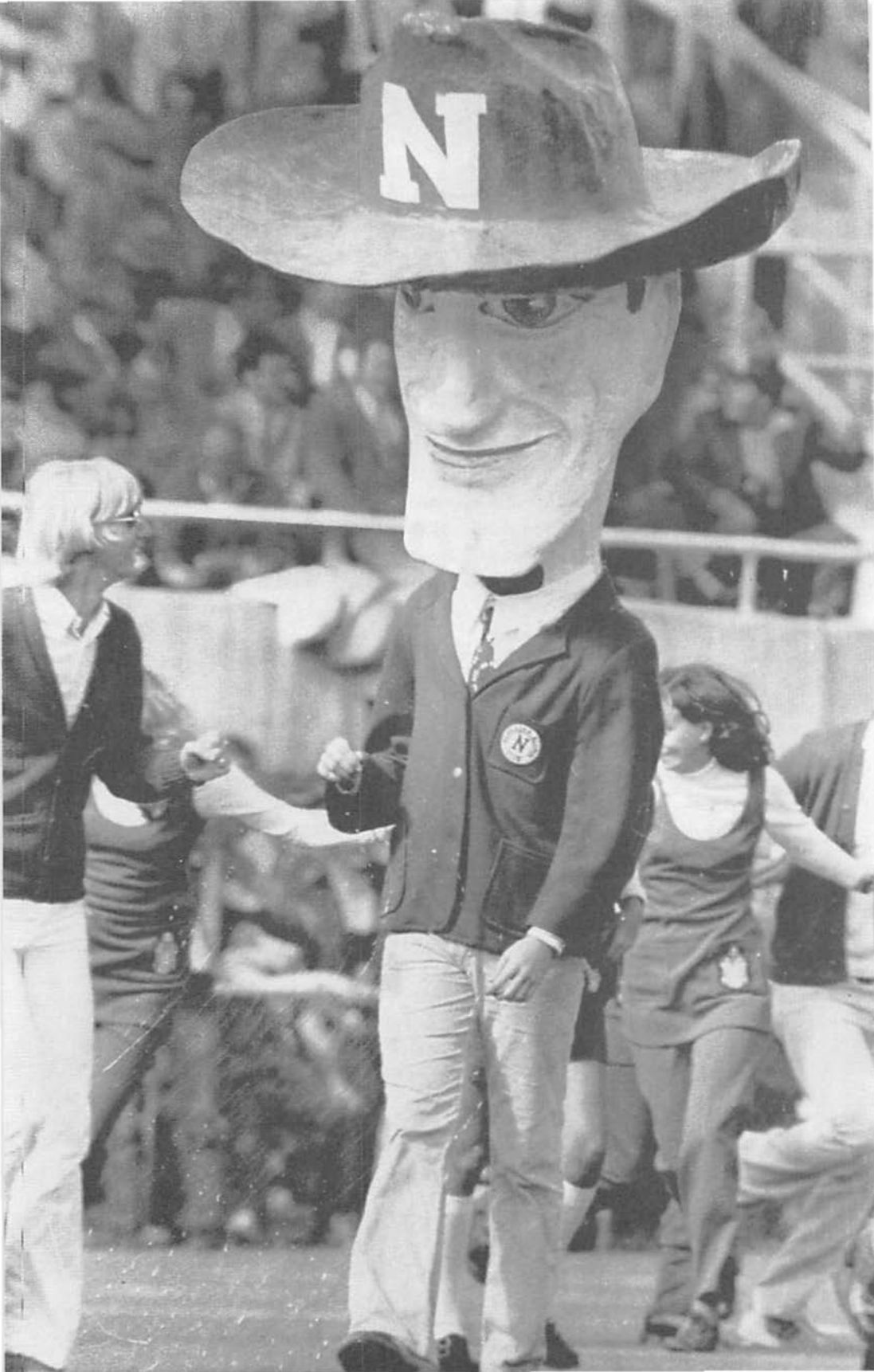
Soon they would leave the lobby to fill the 76,000 seats of Memorial Stadium. They would become the manic Red Sea of humanity that Cornhusker opponents so dread. But on the way there, there were all those stores with all those terrific things to buy that you couldn't get in the little stores in the farm towns out west.

And, all those little things, they get bought. Weekend after weekend. All you people who come in for the game from Scottsbluff and Kearney and Grand Island and Hastings and Chadron and Pierce and North Platte, you ought to know something: You're great for business in Lincoln.

Lanny Jorgensen, a 33-year-old who moved to Lincoln from Kearney a couple of years ago, can tell you all about it. He works for the Lincoln Chamber of Commerce now. He is the director of Lincoln Center Development Committee. He is a man very much responsible for the building boom that is now taking place in downtown Lincoln. He is a man who has a certain grateful spot in his heart for each one of you who comes in for the seven home games a year.

"Football has a terribly large effect on Lincoln," Mr. Jorgensen says. "Mainly that's because there are 76,000 seats and they're all sold out every weekend. And those people that buy them, they come to spend money here.

"They spend it Friday, Saturday, and Saturday night. We figure it brings in a million and a half dollars a weekend. Now



that sounds unreal, but that's what comes in in new coins spent in the city each football weekend.

"We have busloads and carloads of people coming in from as far away as Scottsbluff every time. They do it year in and year out. They stay at the same motels, drink and eat in the same places. Those seven weekends are the seven things they plan each year. They drive 400 or 500 miles and they're coming in to have a hell of a time. The Elks Club, the Legion Club, the bars, they're all incredibly busy on those Saturday nights. Although I suppose if we lose—which doesn't happen too often in Lincoln—business might decline.

"And it's great for retail business, too," Mr. Jorgensen continued. "These people do shop a lot. The university is right downtown, so once they have their car parked it's just a matter of walking to the stores. It's amazing to see the store windows with their red. But they never seem to stop selling those things. You begin to wonder after a while how many red sweaters can they sell? But they do it.

"I'll tell you, there's no question that Devaney put the state, and especially Lincoln, on the map. Prior to him, everyone asked, 'Where's that?' They don't have to ask any more."

They certainly don't. And that's what much of this book is about. Why you don't have to ask anymore. This book is about the history of football at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln.



Johnny Rodgers, All-American wingback, 1971, 1972

1

The Game of the Century

College football thrives on rivalries, on tradition. Great traditional rivalries are the lasting monuments to the magnificent but fleeting accomplishments of athletes who pass through the scene quickly. And these great rivalries, which are many, invariably spawn the most memorable of collegiate football games. The games that receive the big publicity buildups. The games that are talked about for years, even decades, to come. The games played in stadia with 60,000 seats, but the games that 300,000 people will claim to have attended.

These great rivalries are to be found everywhere.

For the Eastern Establishment, for Wall Street and Washington, there is Harvard-Yale, the annual affair that moves between Cambridge and New Haven. To the devotees, this is billed, simply, as THE GAME. On the cover of the programs sold before each Harvard-Yale contest, the contestants are not mentioned. It just bears the legend: THE GAME.

Moving south, there is Alabama-Auburn. In the Big Ten, there is Michigan-Ohio State. Notre Dame plays a whole

16 THE CORNHUSKERS

schedule of traditional rivals, but the most intense seem to be Southern California and Purdue. In Los Angeles, partisans will insist that there is no college football game more consistently exciting or profound than USC-UCLA. You travel north to the Bay and it's Stanford-California.

In the Big Eight, strangely, there isn't one rivalry with the proud, long, intense history of those others. Only the Oklahoma-Texas insanity each October in Dallas could long be listed among that proud group—and Texas isn't a Big Eight team.

That's the way it was, at least, until a gray Thanksgiving Day in 1971.

For on that day on the plastic greensward of Owen Field in Norman, Oklahoma, a traditional rivalry was created. On that day, before 61,826 spectators in the stands and nearly 60 million more who watched the telecast, the greatest collegiate football game ever was played.

It was the one game among the many that lived up to its billing.

The buildup started modestly enough. It began in early November with the Great Plains press and a few wire service stories. On Thanksgiving day, November 25, in Norman, the stories all said Nebraska, which had been ranked Number One since the previous January, despite the protests of Notre Dame's Ara Parseghian, would play Oklahoma.

The Sooners hadn't been ranked all that highly at the beginning of the season; after all, their record had been just 7-4-1 in 1970. They finished tied for second in the Big Eight with Kansas State at 5-2, while Nebraska finished first at 7-0. They had lost to both the Cornhuskers and the Wildcats. In non-conference games, Oklahoma lost to Oregon State and Texas, both rather decisively, and in the Astro-Bluebonnet Bowl had just tied a mediocre Alabama team 24-24.

It had been a good year for the Sooners, but when you used to be Snow White to the rest of the Big Eight's seven dwarfs, it wasn't the kind of year that got you excited about the

future. Whatever optimism there might be had to carry the label "cautious."

Nebraska, meanwhile, was coming off one of the finest seasons in its history. The Huskers capped the 1970 season on New Year's night 1971 with a 17-12 Orange Bowl victory over a very good Louisiana State team. A week after that triumph, the 11-0-1 Cornhuskers were voted the nation's Number One team by the Associated Press. They were selected even though Notre Dame had toppled Texas, which had been ranked first all season, in the Cotton Bowl.

The Huskers didn't lose much off that National Championship team, and most experts figured them a viable candidate to reclaim top honors.

By the time November came around, they were well on their way. Their record was a spotless 8-0. They were winning by impressive scores, and the vanquished included some of the country's other truly great teams, for 1971 was a brilliant year for Big Eight football.

By the same time, though, unlikely Oklahoma was equally undefeated. The Sooners were 7-0. They were winning by impressive scores over the same opponents.

The records indicated that there was, indeed, reason to start being interested. The coaches, Bob Devaney and Chuck Fairbanks, meanwhile, dutifully maintained that there were still two more games to be played by each team, and that on any given Saturday...

Well, what happened on those given Saturdays was this: Nebraska beat Iowa State 37-0 and Kansas State 44-17, while Oklahoma defeated Missouri 20-3 and Kansas 56-10.

And so the stage was set. Nebraska was still atop the polls and Oklahoma had climbed relentlessly to Number Two. Their nineteen games had been a succession of awesome triumphs; successes that would have embarrassed and maddened the losers had the conquerors not been so irrefutably excellent. By the records, there was no question that it was, indeed, this season's game for the ages.

18 THE CORNHUSKERS

NEBRASKA

34 Oregon	7
35 Minnesota	7
34 Texas A&M	7
42 Utah State	6
36 Missouri	0
55 Kansas	0
41 Oklahoma State	13
31 Colorado	7
37 Iowa State	0
44 Kansas State	17

OKLAHOMA

30 Southern Methodist	0
55 Pittsburgh	29
33 Southern California	20
48 Texas	27
45 Colorado	17
75 Kansas State	28
43 Iowa State	12
20 Missouri	3
56 Kansas	10

By Monday morning November 15, the time had come. It *was* the Game of the Century. No more need for modesty in the wire service stories or the Great Plains press. It was time now for infinite dissection. If political campaigns were investigated as scrupulously from every angle as this football game was going to be, we would all know a lot more about what goes on in the country.

Everyone started to put both teams on the couch. All the salient aspects of the two combatants were going to be discussed until there was nothing left. Statistics would be analyzed; so would personalities. The coaches would be interviewed and then interviewed again. Coaches of common opponents would be enlisted to give their impressions. Nothing would be overlooked.

At close inspection, the match-up seemed too good to be true. There would probably be more All-Americans on the field at one time than in any other regular season college football game in history. It was a dream, even before anyone knew how it would turn out. It was the creation of some inventive Hollywood scriptwriter. Teams chocked full of superstars would be pitting their strengths against one another.

Statistically, the game would match not only the finest teams in the Big Eight, playing for the conference championship, but the finest teams in the country, playing for the

national championship. It was one of those times that statistics, usually much overrated, were an accurate barometer of skill.

Oklahoma was the national leader in total offense. In their first nine games, the Sooners ran 684 plays for 5,069 yards and 54 touchdowns. That worked out to an average of 563.2 yards a game, which was, unquestionably, some sort of world record. The Sooners were scoring an average of 45 points a game, which was tops in the country. And they had the most potent ground attack, too. They had gained 4,333 yards in 628 rushing attempts, which was an average of 481.4 rushing yards a game. Their offense was so good that the kicker, John Carrol, had only punted twelve times the whole season.

Nebraska, meanwhile, was no slouch on offense. The Cornhuskers ranked eighth nationally in total offense. They had run 831 plays in their ten games for 4,409 yards, an average of 440.9 a game, and 47 touchdowns. They were fourth in scoring, averaging 38.9 points a game.

But it was at defense that the Cornhuskers truly excelled. They boasted the best in the country. In ten games they had permitted just 1,717 yards and eight touchdowns. They were second in rushing defense, allowing 705 total yards and five touchdowns, and they were second in scoring defense, giving up 6.4 points a game.

The defense, which was known as the Black Shirts because it sounded appropriately nasty and because they did, indeed, wear black jerseys in practice, awed anyone who had stood across the line of scrimmage.

At middle guard was Rich Glover, the 6-foot, 231-pound junior from Jersey City. By the time he would be through at Nebraska he would be considered the greatest middle guard in the history of college football. He would win both the Outland and Lombardi trophies, given to the season's outstanding lineman, in 1972.

Playing next to Glover was Larry Jacobson. He was a 6-6,

20 THE CORNHUSKERS

250-pound senior from Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Some people criticized him. They said he was too slow. They said he wasn't intense enough. They said for a guy his size he didn't hit that hard. They said Glover carried him. They could criticize all they wanted. They didn't know what they were talking about. Larry Jacobson made most All-American teams that year. He won the 1971 Outland Trophy.

They were the mainstays, and they were joined by a pride of other all-stars and All-Americans. There were ends Willie Harper and John Adkins, and Bill Janssen, the right tackle who would captain the 1972 squad. The linebackers were Bob Terrio and Jim Branch, who were all quickness and feline grace—men with the disposition of hungry big cats, not house cats.

And the men who made up the defensive backfield were superb at coming up against the wide rush, as well as at defending against the pass. They were cornerbacks Jim Anderson and Joe Blahak, monsterback Dave Mason and safety Bill Kosch. They had allowed Husker opponents just 99 completions in 232 attempts, and had managed to intercept 24 passes.

It was a marvelous defense, one that had passed every difficult examination easily.

"I think," said Iowa State quarterback Dean Carlson, "the Minnesota Vikings are the only ones who have a defense like theirs."

But if there was one college team that was up to testing the Minnesota Vikings defense, it was Oklahoma. Nebraska played a very conventional 5-4 defense that had few flourishes, and the Cornhuskers had not defended against a Wishbone-T team all year. Oklahoma played a Wishbone-T. They played it better than anyone ever had, better even than Darrell Royal's Texas team that had won a national championship using the Wishbone.

It was the Wishbone that made Bob Devaney and his assistants nervous. It was axiomatic that a five-man front wouldn't work well against the Wishbone. Against Kansas

State, the team that played a 5-4 defense almost identical to Nebraska's, the Sooners had scored eleven of the twelve times they had the ball. They won the game 75-28 and gained a breathtaking 711 yards. Gregg Pruitt, the fast-moving, fast-talking right halfback, had gained 294 yards on just 17 carries. It was indeed, something to get nervous about.

The Sooners had nearly perfect personnel for the Wishbone. At quarterback was Jack Mildren. He was as deceptive with the football as a fine magician with a top hat. He was the consummate ball handler, and that was exactly the kind of quarterback needed. And he wasn't bad at the other aspects of the game. Going into the Thanksgiving Day game, he had gained 968 yards in 153 carries. And he could throw, too. He did it rarely, but he did it well. He had completed 22 of 45 passes for an extraordinary 646 yards and seven touchdowns.

At halfback, the wide threat was the speedy and shiftY Pruitt, who got a first down almost every time he touched the ball. He had gained 1,423 yards in 150 attempts, which was an average of 9.5 yards a carry. And the rest of the backs might have been superstars in their own right, but they were overshadowed. They were Leon Crosswhite, the big fullback, and alternating left halfbacks Joe Wylie and Roy Bell.

"The formation certainly presents a defense with problems," Devaney admitted to reporters. "One of the things about it is that it lets a team spend a lot of time working on its running game because they never get in a long yardage situation where they're forced to pass. But Oklahoma has been able to pass when it wanted to and that's made them even tougher to defense. One of the big things in their success is that they've passed in situations where you didn't know if they would run or pass."

It was an offense that provided a lot of things for Nebraska's coaching staff to think about. Though Devaney warned publicly that it wouldn't be wise to change things too radically, you had to wonder what was going on in his head privately. Before most games the Cornhusker coaching staff met only two

nights a week — Sunday and Monday. In those two meetings, offensive and defensive game plans were devised. In the time preceding the Oklahoma game, though, the coaches met every night. It was clear Devaney didn't consider this most games.

"As far as the regular season goes," said Devaney, "there's never been two teams who have so completely dominated their opponents and then met each other like Nebraska and Oklahoma have this year. Even back in 1966 when you had Michigan State and Notre Dame meeting, at least one of them I'm sure had a game or two where they were pressed. This is the first time two teams have been so dominant and now they're playing each other to see which is the better team."

At the time, Devaney was the most successful football coach in the country. His success was due in no small part to his abilities as a psychologist. In his low-key fashion, he was superb at preparing a team mentally for a game. For this game, though, he didn't have to do much. He laid off.

"We didn't take a special approach to the game with the players at all," he says now. "The team read the newspapers and listened to the radio and television. They knew what the whole thing was about. We watched the team closely that week. If their attitude was that they were going to play the Sisters of the Poor, then we would have done something. But we never had an indication of that. It was a team of pride and a team of leadership with Jerry Tagge and Jim Anderson. So we just tried to prepare the team technically as well as we could."

Fred Casotti, the assistant athletic director at Colorado, described best what the battle would come down to. "It depends on how you want to die," he said. "Oklahoma kills you quick — like a dagger in the heart. Nebraska slowly gives you cancer."

When game day broke murky, chilly gray, the Cornhuskers were ready. They were fit mentally, fit physically and fit strategically. They had been prepared as well as any participant in the Game of the Century could hope to be.

After taking the opening kickoff, the Huskers stalled on three plays. They punted, but Oklahoma couldn't get anywhere on its first three plays from scrimmage, either. The Sooners punted. Joe Wylie got off a decent, high spiral that carried 34 yards to the Nebraska 28. Camped there, waiting, was a bottle of lightning that was about to pop the cork.

The bottle went by the name of Johnny Rodgers, number 20, 5'9", 173 pounds, junior, specialist in demoralization and gridiron pyrotechnics.

A more conventional man would have called for a fair catch on that punt. It was high, and the Oklahoma pursuit was excellent. As the ball settled in Rodgers' arms, it seemed like Rodgers would settle in Greg Pruitt's arms. But Pruitt missed the tackle. He didn't hit hard enough and Rodgers spun free to his right. After three yards it looked like he might be trapped again. Three Sooners were ready to clout him. He faked a stride forward, and then he retreated. The Oklahomans went for the fake and wound up running into one another. Rodgers saw daylight straight ahead. He turned on his sprinter's speed. He started to pick up blockers. He cut to his left behind the wall that was forming. Only one man, Tim Welch, had a shot at him. Rodgers left Welch flatfooted as he cut sharply at the 50-yard line for the left sideline. It was an easy trip from there, and with just 3:32 elapsed, the Cornhuskers had a 7-0 lead.

Even though Rodgers' masterpiece occurred so early in the contest, it was the decisive score. For the next fifty-six-and-one-half minutes of football were spent proving that Oklahoma's offense was as good as everyone thought it was and that Nebraska's was much better than anyone imagined.

The teams were even in touchdowns, four to four, but the Sooners could only come up with a field goal to offset Rodgers' run, and thus the one-point favorite Huskers went back to Lincoln with a four-point victory, 35-31.

Nebraska played the same kind of offense it had used all season — the I-slot and the I-spread. It was a pro-style offense that featured a sensible balance of running and passing. At



Johnny Rodgers in action against Kansas State, 1972

quarterback was Jerry Tagge, the strong-armed senior from Green Bay, Wisconsin. Behind him were fullback Bill Olds, a junior, and Jeff Kinney, the senior I-back. The slot-back was, of course, Rodgers.

Tagge came into the game having completed 125 of 202 passes for 1,706 yards and a sterling 61.9 completion percentage. Oklahoma coach Chuck Fairbanks was intent on taking the passing game away from the Huskers. Confined to the ground, he thought, Nebraska would not be very effective. So all day, the Sooners double- and triple-teamed Rodgers. Every time he ran a pass pattern he had a convoy of red jerseys running with him. The Sooners, with just cause, were petrified of the havoc Rodgers might wreak if he were to get the ball in the open field. Already that season, he had caught 45 passes for 759 yards and ten touchdowns.

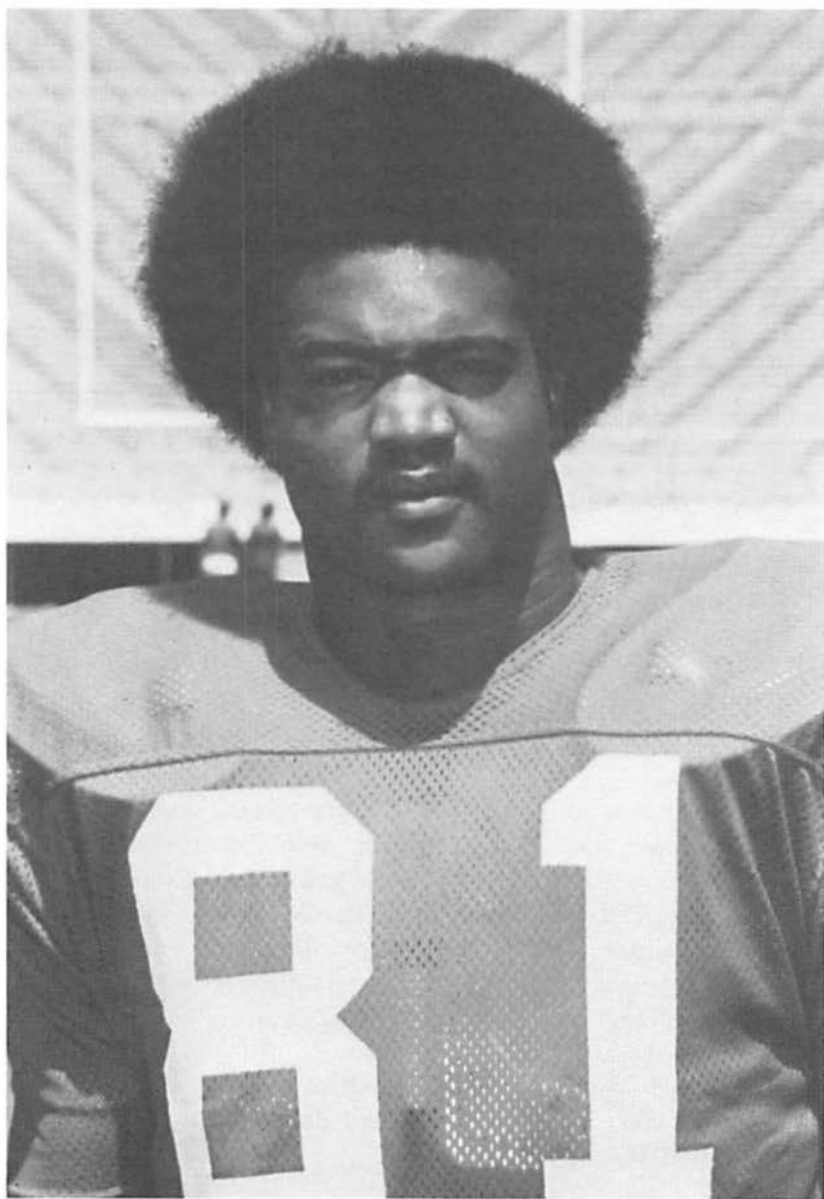
So Tagge didn't force the issue. The Huskers threw only thirteen passes all day and completed six for 65 yards.

Instead, time and time again, Tagge handed the ball to Kinney. Thirty-one times he called Kinney's number, and the big back from McCook, Nebraska, responded every time. Not once was the Oklahoma defense able to nail him for a loss. He piled up 174 yards rushing, and scored four of the Huskers' touchdowns.

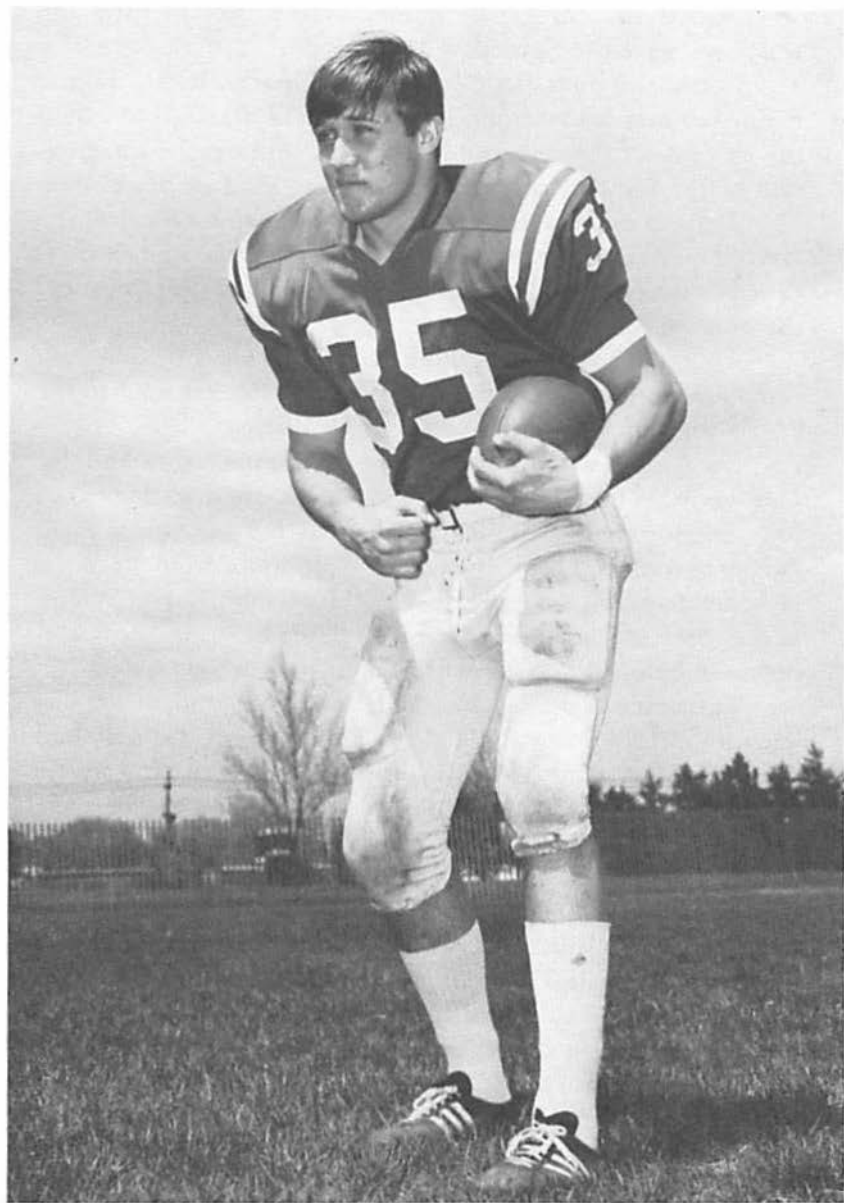
Oklahoma, meanwhile, was doing things a little differently on offense, too. Led by Glover, who was involved in an incredible twenty-two tackles, the Black Shirts took away much of the Oklahoma rushing attack in the Wishbone. The Sooners rushed 64 times and gained a very human 279 yards, which was 18 less than Nebraska accumulated in four fewer carries. Pruitt, who had talked a terrific game all week, rushed just 10 times for 53 yards.

But Mildren took up the slack. Not only did he run 31 times for 130 yards, but he passed extraordinarily well. He completed five of ten passes for 137 yards and two touchdowns.

The second touchdown pass, with seven minutes and ten



Willie Harper, All-American end, 1971, 1972



Jeff Kinney, All-American I-back, 1971

28 THE CORNHUSKERS

seconds left to play in the game, a 16-yarder to little Jon Harrison, gave the Sooners a 31-28 lead.

But it also gave the Huskers the opportunity to stage a heroic last march to victory. Just the kind of march that would eat up most of the remaining time and capture the imagination of the football cognescenti. Just the kind of march you would expect to see in the greatest football game ever. Just the kind of march you would expect from what has since been called by many knowledgeable people, including Bob Devaney, the greatest football team ever.

After the touchdown, John Carroll kicked off. The ball came down to Kinney at the Nebraska 15. He returned to the 26. Seven minutes and five seconds were left.

On first down, Rodgers reversed around right end for four yards. Then Kinney went over his right tackle, Carl Johnson, for five yards. Rain began to fall on Owen Field during that play. Then Kinney took a pitch-out from Tagge as he headed around left end. He got a block from Darryl White, broke three tackles, and carried 17 yards down to the Oklahoma 48 before Larry Roach brought him down.

The next two plays gained only two yards, and Tagge was left with a third down and eight to go. The previous play had been a roll-out to the left, with Tagge intending to hit Rodgers on the left sideline. Under pressure, Tagge had to fling the ball out of bounds. This time, Tagge called a roll-out right. As he took the snap from center and moved away from the line of scrimmage, the Oklahoma rush line, led by Ray (Sugar Bear) Hamilton, came hard and vicious. It appeared inevitable that they would capture Tagge. It was a moment as horrifying for Nebraska fans as any Alfred Hitchcock ever dreamed of. Somehow, Tagge managed to avoid the inevitable and keep his date with destiny. As he sprinted right, he saw Johnny Rodgers, who had run a hook pattern from the right slot, on his knees at the 35-yard line. Tagge drew back and rocketed the ball low between two Oklahoma defenders. Rodgers caught the ball in his gut. It was first down at the 35 and 4:37 remained on the

clock. You don't mess with destiny's sweethearts.

On the next play, it was Kinney again. He took a handoff, cut off another of White's blocks and gained 13 yards to the 22. Then, in succession, Rodgers gained seven, Kinney gained seven, and Kinney gained two. Two minutes and 35 nervous seconds were left to play, when Derland Moore and Lucious Selmon combined to bring Kinney down at the six. As Kinney hit the Tartan Turf, Tagge signaled for time out.

Tagge trotted to the sideline for a talk with Devaney. Both men were collected. Both men were supremely confident. Both men were sensible.

"I'll take us in, Coach," Tagge said.

"We're going for the touchdown," Devaney said. "No field goals, no ties."

"We'll get it," Tagge said.

"What's your best play?" Devaney asked, testing his quarterback.

"I think it's the off-tackle with Jeff," was the answer.

"OK," was the order. "Let's run it without any mistakes."

Nebraska hadn't made many mistakes all day—just one five-yard offsides penalty, and one fumble lost—and they weren't about to start making them when just six yards stood between them and greatness.

The sure-handed Tagge took the snap from center Doug Dumler. He pivoted to his left and stuck the ball in Kinney's gut. Kinney crunched over left tackle and picked up four of the six yards. There were two left and they were going to be his.

Once again, Tagge spun to the left away from Dumler, the ball secure in his hands. Once again, Tagge stuck it in Kinney's gut. Once again, Kinney went over White's left tackle spot. Once again, Kinney scored a touchdown. Once again, Nebraska was ahead. When Rich Sanger kicked the extra point, it gave the Huskers a 35-31 lead with 1:38 left. It had been a 12-play, 74-yard drive. It had been conducted with a spectacularly modest efficiency. It was the kind of drive great

30 THE CORNHUSKERS

football is all about.

A modest burst of exuberance went up along the Nebraska sideline. There were low-key congratulations. Jack Mildren had been too miraculous all afternoon for any Nebraska player or partisan to think it was in the bag. Jack Mildren could do wondrous things with a football in a minute and a half.

Devaney knew this. He urged his defensive troops before they went out on the field. He didn't want them overconfident. He didn't want them making any mistakes.

"Why the hell don't some of you guys give Glover some help this time?" he asked.

They did.

Mildren tried a long pass up the middle to Harrison that he had to over-throw because Blahak was attached to Harrison like another layer of skin. Mildren kept on the next play, but could only get four yards. Next, Mildren faded back to pass again, but we'll never know what pattern Jack had in mind, because before he could even set up, Jacobson dumped him for an eight-yard loss.

It was now fourth down and 14 to go or be doomed. Mildren dropped back to pass for the last time. Glover bore in on him. Mildren cranked up and fired. Glover knocked down the pass before it traveled more than a few feet.

Nebraska took the ball on the 16. One minute and ten seconds remained. No place to make mistakes. The Huskers ran out the clock.

After that, it was pandemonium in the Nebraska locker room and all over the proud state to the north.

Just seconds after the game ended, President Richard Nixon called up the Owen Field press box from the Western White House in San Clemente. Nixon was asking for Devaney. He had to wait a half-hour to talk to him.

The triumph was the most important victory in the history of Nebraska football. For despite all the success of the Devaney era and all the success of previous coaches like Dana X. Bible

and Biff Jones, despite an unbeaten season and a number one ranking in 1970, Nebraska was still not considered among the glamour powers of college football until it beat Oklahoma. Until those few hours on Thanksgiving Day, Nebraska had been considered a football aberration. People would simply not consider it in the same way as Southern Cal, Notre Dame, Alabama, Ohio State, Michigan, and, yes, even Oklahoma. That one triumph did more to give glamour to Cornhusker football than all the previous 81 years.

After the game, Devaney heaped only modest praise on his gladiators.

"You played a great game," Devaney told the silent players. "It was the greatest football game ever played, and you took part in it and you won it. It's yours, but just remember that you have two games left to play."

They remembered and they beat Hawaii and Alabama to cap a 13-0 season.

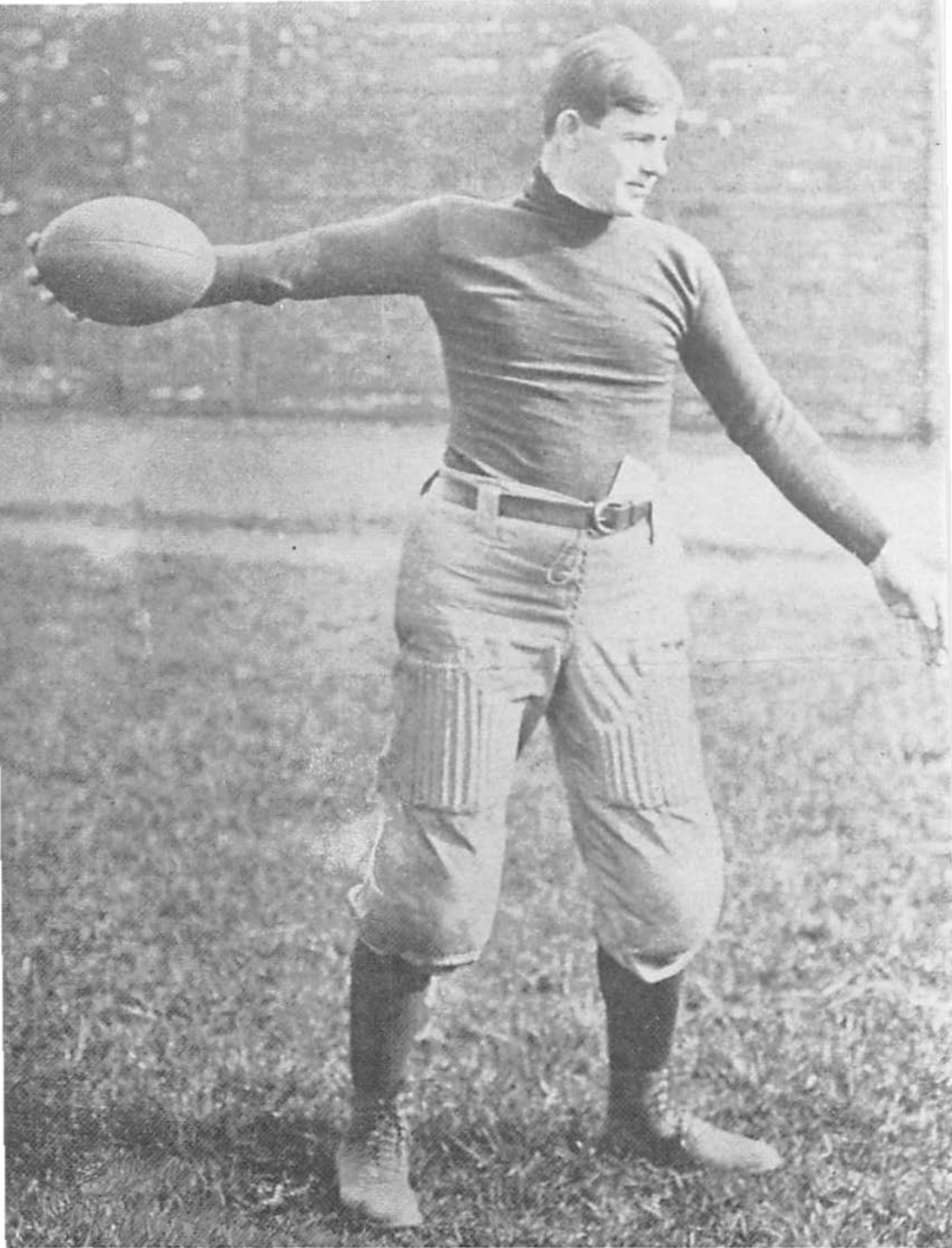
But that afternoon, when he talked to the press, Devaney told everyone what mattered most to him.

"It's the greatest victory of my career," said the man who had won so many great ones before. "The way we did it, coming from behind against a great Oklahoma team, makes me very proud of this team. It will make for a very happy Thanksgiving for everyone back in Nebraska."

It certainly did make for a very happy Thanksgiving as a whole state sat down to turkey dinner late that afternoon. And later that evening, 32,000 people turned out to welcome the team when its charter flight arrived at tiny Lincoln Airport.

Yes, it was a joyous Thanksgiving, and it sure was a lot different from another gray Thanksgiving. The one they had in 1890.

A University of Nebraska team played football on the road that Thanksgiving afternoon, too, but hardly anyone took notice. It wasn't quite the game of the decade, or even the day, probably. But it was important. It was very important.



Fielding H. Yost, Nebraska coach, 1898

2

Genesis and First Success

At a cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, President Abraham Lincoln was quite self-effacing one afternoon. He told the assembled crowd that few would remember what he said there that day.

He was wrong, of course. For schoolchildren to this day still memorize the words he spoke there.

He was wrong just as twelve men of the University of Nebraska were wrong when they assumed little would come of a trip they made from Lincoln to Omaha on Thanksgiving Day, November 27, 1890.

It's not that those twelve men made history of the sort that a president could make with an eloquent speech; it's not that anyone often really remembers what it was exactly that they did there. But they did do something that leaves its mark all through the state of Nebraska each fall. They played the first University of Nebraska football game.

The student call for a football team had started as early as 1883. In that year, the editor of the *Hesperian*, one of the

34 THE CORNHUSKERS

student newspapers, wrote: "If a football team could be formed we might in years to come have enough college enthusiasm to designate ours a real college and not a gathering place for those who do not know what a live college should be."

The *Hesperian* and other important student voices continued to urge the formation of a football squad the next few years, but their words went unheeded. Baseball was the sport on campus, and many people thought baseball quite enough.

In the fall of 1889, fully six years after the first call was sounded, students finally started to play football at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Class and school teams played on a field that was laid out by a group of civil engineering students. It was on the northwest corner of the campus, and because of space restrictions was only 11/16 the size of a regulation field.

A man named A. J. McClatchie, who had learned the sport before transferring west from Olivet College in Michigan, did most of the coaching. It was a job that consisted of teaching rules and instructing basics. Football sophistication wasn't great then out on the plains. McClatchie also captained and quarterbacked on the teams.

The University of South Dakota issued a challenge to Nebraska, but it was never met. Winter came early that fall, frosting over any hopes for a game, and, besides, there was no single team on Nebraska's campus organized and skilled enough for such intercollegiate competition.

But the time was coming, and the *Hesperian* wanted assurances that students would be able to seize the next opportunity for some kind of outside play. "The university is going at football in earnest and it is now necessary to clothe the team," the *Hesperian* wrote in December. "Canvas shirts for the 11 would cost a little over \$35. Members of the faculty should dig into their pockets for funds."

It has never been recorded for posterity whether members of the faculty followed the student journalists' advice, but somehow the money was raised, and the next fall the University of Nebraska's eleven had canvas shirts with "UN" across the

front.

Now all the school needed was a team to wear the shirts. That came in early October. On the same day that the university announced an enrollment of 500, it announced that the faculty had authorized the athletic association to prepare a football team for outside play.

Slightly more than a month later, on November 15, the *Nebraska State Journal* reported that the university's new football team had received a challenge from the Omaha YMCA for a game to be played at the Omaha ball park. As an inducement, and as reimbursement for traveling expenses incurred, the YMCA offered to hand over two-thirds of the gate receipts.

The challenge was quickly accepted. And on that Thanksgiving Day, as the winds blew hard across the heartland, a delegation from the student body accompanied the football squad to its first game.

It was an auspicious beginning. Nebraska beat the YMCA 10-0, scoring three safeties and a touchdown, then worth four points, by A.N. Troyer. The next day, the *Omaha World-Herald* carried its first account of a Nebraska football game.

"The Lincoln team had the better teamwork and locals had the better individual players who failed to play into each other's hands," the *World-Herald* reported. "It was the first game . . . of football that had been seen in Omaha and there were several hundred out to see the boys enjoy themselves and break each other's shins The visitors were accompanied by a delegation of their Lincoln friends who carried flags of a dull brindle color and gave vent to a series of yells of a still more dismal hue The game resembled the old-fashioned game of log-heap more than anything else. When one of the players secured the ball he immediately proceeded to fall down and the rest fell over him The cries of foul were as frequent as at a prize fight at the Magic City Athletic Club, and the injuries inflicted on the participants were far more serious. The visitors scored three safety touchdowns and just at the

close of the game added four points by a clean touchdown."

When the game was over, the man who had been the genius behind Nebraska's football genesis was heartily congratulated by the players. He went by the unlikely name of Dr. Langdon Frothingham. He came west from Harvard that fall to instruct in bacteriology and agriculture and study veterinary medicine. He also came west with a football, and that made him something of an expert to the neophytes in Lincoln. He was made Nebraska's first football coach soon after his appearance.

After coaching one more game, Dr. Frothingham resigned as Nebraska's only undefeated football coach, and returned to Massachusetts to teach at the Boston Medical School. The second game of the initial season was actually played on February 13, 1891. The Old Gold Knights, as the team referred to itself, traveled southwest to Crete to play Doane. Nebraska won that game 18-0, but they did it with Dr. Frothingham on crutches. It seems that while preparing the team for Doane, he suffered a broken ankle during a scrimmage. But he did prepare the team well, as Ebenezer E. Mockett, the first captain and a star halfback, later testified.

"Nothing would have come of our desire to play football if Dr. Frothingham hadn't joined the faculty," he said. "We had read about what they were doing at Harvard and Yale, and among ourselves we tried to put what we had read into practice. But we didn't know enough. We asked Dr. Frothingham to help. He was enthusiastic. And so were we as we got ready for that very first of all contests, with the Omaha YMCA."

The next fall, 1891, there was great optimism. A new gymnasium, Grant Memorial Hall, had been built, and a physical education instructor, W. P. Bowen, was hired. Devotees were anticipating great things for University of Nebraska athletics. Especially for the football team. All but one of the players from the inaugural season were returning, and Iowa, a major school, had been added to the schedule.

But it turned out that Bowen, who was expected to pro-

vide the same leadership Dr. Frothingham had, knew nothing of football. That left things up to halfback Mockett, who was once again the captain of the squad.

Nebraska opened the season at home against Doane College and won 28-4. Two weeks later, though, Nebraska went down to its first defeat when it met Doane again, this time in Crete. Doane won that game 14-12.

Next on Nebraska's schedule was its first major intercollegiate battle. The opponent was Iowa, and they were to meet on a playing field in Omaha on Thanksgiving Day, November 26. Through a professor, E. H. Barbour, the football team was able to obtain the services of a coach to prepare it for the Iowa contest. His name was T. U. Lyman. He was the Iowa coach, but he volunteered, in a fit of sportsmanship the likes of which college athletics has not since witnessed, to coach Nebraska's practices. He did this so, he said, Iowa would have a worthy opponent.

Well, if the opponent was worthy, it was also inferior. And before 2,500 in Omaha, the Hawkeyes defeated Nebraska 22-0.

There was still one more game that season — against omnipresent Doane — and Nebraska managed to salvage a .500 season by triumphing 32-0.

In that game, a running back named George Flippin scored three touchdowns. He was the largest man on the squad at 200 pounds. He was also black. He was, as far as anyone can tell, the first black ever to play major college football.

At the end of the season, though, the *Nebraska State Journal* put the season's troubles in perspective, and exercised a bit of foresight.

"A football club cannot be supported without money," it said. "Suits are needed and the boys also want to engage a coacher . . . They cannot win against Iowa and Minnesota without hired coachers and possibly hired players."

There wouldn't be hired players for quite a while, but shortly thereafter, a course of action was initiated that would

lead the University of Nebraska to the position of football prominence it so dearly cherishes today.

On December 28, 1891, in Kansas City, Missouri, representatives of the athletic associations of the universities of Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri met. They formed the Interstate League and established financial and eligibility rules.

The next fall, in its first season, the Interstate League encountered its first bit of difficulty. Missouri refused to play Nebraska unless George Flippin was benched. The lily-white Tigers were still filled with the bitterness of the Civil War and took umbrage at the thought of being on equal terms with a black man on a playing field. They took even greater umbrage at the thought of that black man, Flippin, showing them up on the playing field, something he was eminently capable of doing.

Even though Missouri advised Nebraska several months before the game of its intentions, a compromise was not worked out. There was simply no way that Nebraska was willing to play without Flippin. Not only was he the star player, but in the absence of coach J. S. Williams, the Omaha barrister who attended just one game, Flippin was the coach.

So Missouri refused to make the trip to Lincoln, and Nebraska was awarded a 1-0 forfeit victory. It was one of just two victories for the team, which was variously nicknamed the Bug-Eaters, the Antelopes, and the Rattlesnake Boys. The other triumph that season came over Illinois before a crowd of 800 on the Lincoln campus. The final score was 6-0, and the *Nebraska State Journal* took the opportunity to report on the crowd as well as the game.

"One fellow," the newspaper said, "wore a vest half red, half white." The newspaper didn't note and could little know that the man clad in that vest might very well have started the madness that is so evident now in Lincoln on the game days when Memorial Stadium turns into a sea of red and white clothing.

The other three games that season were losses to Kansas and the Denver Athletic Club and a 10-10 tie with Iowa, the team that had been so decisively triumphant just a year before.

Clearly, fortunes were on the upswing.

The Autumn of 1893 brought the first salaried coach to Lincoln. He was Frank Crawford, a Yale man, and his arrival marked the first time admission was charged for Nebraska home games. It was twenty-five cents. Crawford was a graduate student so he took some of his \$500 salary in free tuition.

The season turned out to be just another mediocre one, 2-2-2, but there was, at least, a big win. It came in a blizzard on November 30, by a 20-18 score over Iowa. Flippin was nothing short of spectacular. He finished the game a ghastly injured mess as frozen blood from wounds on his face and hands was caked on his uniform.

The other win that season came over perpetual patsy Doane by a 28-0 count. The ties were with Baker and the Denver AC, and the losses were to Kansas and Missouri. The Tigers had agreed to play Nebraska despite Flippin's presence because at the end of the previous season, in a meeting of Interstate League members in Kansas City, it was agreed that any team that failed to fulfill its scheduled games would owe the aggrieved team 50 dollars.

By the end of the 1893 season, Nebraska was beset by financial problems. Crawford's salary had created a \$200 deficit for the athletic association. Faculty members wouldn't accede to pleas that they make up the deficit out of their own pockets, and athletic disaster was imminent. Students, however, dug into their own depleted pockets and Crawford agreed to stay on as coach another year.

Crawford's decision turned into a fine one for Nebraska. For in that 1894 season, he led the Bug-Eaters to a 6-2 season and the championship of the Interstate League. They clinched the title by beating Kansas 12-6 and Iowa 36-0. But they lost a league game to Missouri 18-14 in Kansas City. Other victims that season included the YMCA of Omaha twice, Ottawa, and

40 THE CORNHUSKERS

Grinnell. The second defeat was inflicted by ever-present Doane, by a 12-0 score.

At the end of the season, Crawford departed. He was replaced by Charley Thomas. Thomas had come over from Doane in the middle of the 1894 season to be the line coach. In his first season, Thomas picked up where Crawford left off. Once again, he led the Bug-Eaters to the championship of the Interstate League. This time they beat Iowa 6-0 and Missouri 12-10 before losing to Kansas 8-4. The other wins that season were over Doane, Omaha University, the Sioux City AC and the Denver AC. The losses were to Grinnell and to the Butte (Montana) Athletic Club.

It was the 16-6 loss to Butte that raised the ire of the faculty, and finally got it involved in the football program.

The good professors, it seems, were terribly upset that students took four or five days out from their academics to play a "meaningless" game of football in Montana. The administration acted quickly to remedy the problem. Thereafter, it insisted, faculty members would have to pass approval on the football schedule.

And so it was that year that football became an integral part of university life. Not only did the faculty take notice, but students did, too, in much greater numbers and in more meaningful ways.

Two coeds, Willa Cather and Dorothy Canfield, who was the daughter of the chancellor, collaborated on a short story about football. It appeared in the literary annual, the *Sombrero*, and won the Literary Club's first prize for fiction. Also that year, Roscoe Pound, who would later become the distinguished and much-honored dean of Harvard University's School of Law, wrote a series of football cheers in Latin.

Despite his success in 1895, by the fall of 1896 Charley Thomas was gone from the Lincoln campus. He was replaced by another easterner, this time a man from Brown University named E. N. Robinson. In his first season, Robinson didn't make too great an impression. Nebraska managed to accumu-

late a 5-3-1 record, losing two of its conference games, to Kansas and Iowa.

The next season, though, Robinson returned Nebraska to its familiar berth atop the Interstate League. After opening the season with a resounding 41-0 victory over Missouri, Nebraska was scheduled to face Kansas in Lincoln. The game, many thought, would be one that determined the league championship. Coming in, the Jayhawks, who had beaten Iowa stunningly in their season opener, were decisive 2-1 and 3-1 favorites in the widespread betting. But Nebraska drew first blood as fullback George Shedd rammed over from short range for a touchdown, and held on to defeat the Jayhawks 6-5. Robinson's team finished the season with just one loss in six games, that coming at the hands of Iowa State 10-0.

After that 1897 season, Iowa withdrew from the Interstate Conference. It was a severe blow to the conference and a harbinger of its demise.

In 1898, Nebraska had a new coach, a man destined for greatness elsewhere. His name was Fielding Yost, and the position in Lincoln was just the second job of his young career. In 1897, Yost had made a national reputation for himself at Ohio Wesleyan by defeating Ohio State 6-0 and tying Michigan. Yost took the job in Lincoln because he wanted to see the country his own way. He did quite well, winning the last Interstate Conference title, and running up a 7-4 record. Through late November Yost's team had a 7-1 record, losing only to William Jewell. But then Nebraska lost its last three games, by identical 6-5 scores to Drake and Iowa and by an astonishing 24-0 to the Kansas City Medics.

Yost, who would achieve coaching immortality at Michigan, departed at season's end for the head coaching position at Kansas, and without him Nebraska's football fortunes hit absolute rock bottom.

Under A. Edwin Branch, an import from Massachusetts' Williams College, the Nebraska team of 1899 was a dismal 2-7-1. But failure wasn't tolerated at Lincoln in those days,

and even before the century turned, A. Edwin Branch was unemployed and heading back for the East from whence he had come.

University administrators were still looking east, though, for their football leadership. And in New Jersey, on the campus of Princeton University, they found just the sort of man they were looking for.

For \$600 a year and all the bone-chilling winter winds a cultured, refined man could tolerate, Walter Cowles Booth, a gentlemanly scholar trained at Andover Academy and then at genteel Princeton, left the east for the Great Plains. He arrived directly from Princeton, where for the previous three years (1897-99) he had been the center of the football team. He also arrived carrying the quite unelegant nickname of Bummy, which, of course, was what everyone would call him.

He was everything university administrators had hoped for when they sent A. Edwin Branch back to Providence and called on Booth as a replacement. "Mr. Booth is a man of prepossessing appearance," it was written in the yearbook. "His frank, open face makes one feel at home with him at once, and his magnificent physique inspires everyone to athletics. He is a happy combination of athlete, scholar and perfect gentleman." Which means that at Princeton he learned more than just a little bit about how to coach a winning football team.

And so, in his first season, 1900, Bummy Booth did just that. A Nebraska team that just a year before had been a 2-7-1 laughingstock became a team to be reckoned with. In its first game it beat Lincoln High School, which then was still an adequate if oft-conquered foe, 17-0. That was followed with 30-0 and 8-0 blankings of Iowa State and Drake. The fourth game turned into still another shutout, this time of the Kansas City Medics, the team that had triumphed 24-0 the previous season, but in this game Nebraska, too, was shut out, for a scoreless tie. But Bummy's boys wouldn't be daunted. They followed the tie with four more whitewashes. Tarkio fell by five, Missouri by 12, Grinnell by 33, and Kansas by 12.

That brought Nebraska, undefeated and unscored upon, to its final game of the season. On November 29, the powerful Golden Gophers of Minnesota traveled down from Minneapolis. Five thousand spectators lined the field in Lincoln, and prominent among them was William Jennings Bryan. The crowd prevailed upon him to deliver a pre-game oration.

"Nothing but football is in order this day," he told them.

"What about the game? What's your idea?" they insisted.

"You, Nebraska, can conquer," he replied. "Let each person punctuate that as he will."

What happened, though, is that Minnesota, which had punctured each of its previous opponents at will, punctured Nebraska. The Gophers ran up 20 points to Nebraska's 12, which still was a considerable amount considering the quality of the opposition.

At the end of that season, the young telegraph editor of the Lincoln *Star*, who wrote about Nebraska football in his spare time, looked back. Earlier in the campaign, he had called the team the Cornhuskers, searching for a nickname more appropriate and dignified than Bug-Eaters or Rattlesnake Boys or any of those others.

"That name Cornhuskers fits 'em," reflected Charles Sumner (Cy) Sherman. "Seven wins, two ties, and only one loss in their first season. I think I did a good job when I hung it on them."

Thus it is today that Cornhuskers is one of the proudest nicknames in all of college football.

In 1901, Nebraska entered its first full campaign as the Cornhuskers flushed with optimism. Things had been going so well that they applied for membership in the prestigious Big Nine, which was the ancestor of the Big Ten. The application was declined. But on that 1901 schedule remained two Big Nine teams. They were Minnesota and Wisconsin, and as it turned out, they were the only two blots on the Cornhuskers' record. After winning their first three games by shutouts, the Cornhuskers were accompanied by 2,500 fans as they trekked up to

44 THE CORNHUSKERS

Minneapolis. There, they were the victims of a shutout, losing 19-0.

After beating Iowa State 17-0, Nebraska made another trip to a northern metropolis. This time it was to Milwaukee to meet the University of Wisconsin. The trip was just as unsuccessful. Wisconsin blanked the Huskers 18-0.

But the Huskers bounced back well; they won their final three games over Missouri, Kansas, and Haskell to finish with another fine season under Bummy Booth, 7-2.

Little did Bummy know, then, that his next team, the squad of 1902, would make history, would accomplish something no other Nebraska team would in the next seven decades.

The stars of that 1902 team were right halfback Johnny Bender, the speed merchant; quarterback Maurice Benedict, and John Westover, the right tackle and captain, who in 1897, while still the captain of the Lincoln High team, substituted for the Nebraska varsity in one of the first bits of eligibility rules bending.

The Huskers opened the season with three consecutive shutouts. Lincoln High fell 26-0, Doane 51-0, and Colorado 10-0.

The fourth game, on October 18, was a rematch with the Gophers. Revenge was on everyone's mind as they trundled off from Lincoln once again for the northland. This time 3,000 fans accompanied the team. As halftime neared, the score was tied at zero, but Nebraska had the ball and was marching. A ten-yard penalty put the ball just ten yards from the Minnesota goal line. Benedict sneaked for a few more yards, and then Bender went right through the middle of Minnesota's big line down to six inches from the goal line.

The Gophers expected the same play again: Bender through the middle. Instead, he scampered untouched around end, in a bit of play-calling genius by Booth. Bender then kicked the point after goal to give the Huskers a 6-0 lead. The second half turned out to be a scoreless deadlock, and the Cornhuskers returned to Lincoln drunk with enthusiasm after

one of the biggest wins in their football history.

But there was no hangover, and they rolled right through their final six opponents of the fall. Grinnell fell 17-0, then Missouri 12-0 and Haskell 28-0. The next two games were shutout victories, too, over Kansas by 16 and Knox by 7. And when Northwestern fell 12-0 on November 27, the Cornhuskers completed the only unbeaten, untied, unscored upon season in their football history.

A sane man probably would have considered it too much to ask for another perfect season in 1903, but, for a total of 11 points allowed, that's exactly what Booth's exacting Cornhuskers produced as they swept through all 11 of their opponents.

The incredible winning skein had to come to an end, and 1904 was when the inevitability struck. After winning their first three games by whitewashes, the Cornhuskers were to face Colorado. Everyone expected the string to continue to 28 games. But it ended abruptly at 27, when the Buffaloes turned the Cornhuskers' trick against them and triumphed 6-0. There were two other losses that year, to Minnesota and Haskell, and when the season concluded with an 8-3 record, spoiled fans started to yell for Bummy Booth's scalp. They almost got it, when he announced his resignation. But he recanted and stayed on when the administration told him he would be succeeded by a Yale man. There were few things considered more despicable by a Princeton man back then than a Yale man.

In 1905, Bummy's team finished the season with a rather respectable 9-2 record. The only losses were inflicted by Minnesota and Michigan. The dissatisfaction among the demanding Nebraska fanatics grew more widespread. Yale man or no Yale man, Bummy decided he had taken enough undeserved abuse. So after winning 53 and tying two of 62 games, Bummy Booth packed his bags and headed for New York where he became a very successful attorney.

As it turned out, Bummy was not replaced by a Yale man but by something almost as horrible — a Dartmouth man. His

46 THE CORNHUSKERS

name was Amos Foster, and he wouldn't be around very long. His team accumulated a 6-4 record. The losses were to Iowa State, Minnesota, Kansas, and the University of Chicago.

Chicago was led by Walter Eckersall, the great All-American, who was playing his last collegiate game. He made sure it was a fitting departure, and he kicked five field goals as he led the Maroons to a 38-5 triumph. The Cornhuskers finished their season one week later, beating Cincinnati 41-0, but even that wasn't going to save Foster's neck. He resigned after that game and also left for the east — Cincinnati, ironically — and a private law practice.

The next year, 1907, brought a new coach and a new conference for the University of Nebraska. The coach was W. C. (King) Cole, and the new conference was the Missouri Valley, which would last for two decades.

In his first season, Cole's team showed much improvement over its predecessors. The Cornhuskers ran up some very big scores that year, including an 85-0 victory over Doane, on their way to an 8-2 record and a share of the Missouri Valley crown. The only two losses were to old nemesis Minnesota and to St. Louis University.

The next year, 1908, the Cornhuskers moved into Nebraska Field. But their record didn't change much. It was 7-2-1. The tie was a scoreless affair with Minnesota, and the losses were to Kansas and the Carlisle Indian School. That 1908 Carlisle team was the one coached by Pop Warner and starring Jim Thorpe. It had little trouble disposing of Nebraska 37-6, even though the game was in Lincoln. By virtue of its triumph over the Huskers, Kansas won the Missouri Valley crown uncontested.

The next Missouri Valley champion was uncontested, but there was no chance of its being Nebraska. The Cornhuskers were nothing short of dreadful in 1909, and they managed just a 3-3-2 record.

That record didn't sit well with the partisans, but King Cole managed to hold on to his job for the next season anyway.

Part of the reason may have been that the athletic association was showing a profit. The fiscal success had started to come with Bummy Booth's success on the playing field. In Booth's first two years of coaching he was paid \$600; by the time he left for New York he was making slightly more than \$2,000. Cole had started at \$2,000, gotten a raise to \$2,500, and in his last season, 1910, was making \$3,000.

He earned the money that year, as he led the Cornhuskers to a fine comeback season. They ran up a 7-1 record, claimed their first undisputed Missouri Valley Conference championship, and in the season finale beat Haskell 119-0. But that final game was also King Cole's final game. He resigned his post, frustrated at being unable to beat arch rival Minnesota, which had blanked Nebraska that year 27-0.

And so an era ended. Nebraska football had been securely established. It was fiscally sound and would be forever. Football had taken a major role in university life, and that would be forever, too.

Now the school was ready to go big time. The school was ready to establish a national reputation. And that's exactly what it did in its next era.



Vic Halligan, All-American tackle, 1914

3

Going Big Time

By the second decade of the twentieth century, college football had become something more than what the boys at school did to amuse themselves on nice autumn afternoons. It had already started to create the passions that are so evident now on those Saturday afternoons. It had already started to become a major medium of entertainment.

This was true in the East, at the grand old schools like Harvard and Yale and Princeton; it was true in the Midwest at schools like Chicago, Ohio State, Michigan, and Wisconsin. And it was clearly coming to be true in the Great Plains, at universities like Nebraska.

So it was that a new coach for the University of Nebraska walked into this atmosphere. A coach who would, more than any other man for a half century, lead the University of Nebraska to national football prominence, to greatness in the big time.

He was a tall man, 6 feet, 4 inches, with a lean and hungry look. His eyes were set deep and dark, his nose was

distinctively long and angular, and his hair was combed straight back from his forehead. He came off the University of Wisconsin Campus, where he had been a star center from 1906-1908, to achieve coaching greatness in Lincoln, Nebraska.

His name was Ewald O. Stiehm, which was pronounced "steam," and inevitably his powerful teams would become known as the Stiehm Rollers. Ewald O., though, wasn't the kind of name a proud man liked to be called in those days, so he opted for Jumbo, because he had big feet.

Jumbo Stiehm had pretty much the perfect temperament for a football coach. He was part intellectual, part maniac. In a time when football was a fairly basic business of smashing heads and bruising bones and inflicting pain in the name of sport and fun, Jumbo was something of an artist.

Stiehm was Nebraska's first master of sophisticated offense. He opted for speed and durability, rather than the brutishness of slow strength. He never coached a team that averaged as much as 160 pounds per player. He preferred narrow-eyed, dark-tempered linemen who weighed 160 or 165 pounds. And he liked small runners who could skitter across the field like frightened water bugs.

Always, Jumbo Stiehm's teams were practiced at the art of deception. The Cornhuskers of his time used fake passes, fake runs, cross-bucks, end runs that started as line bucks, and line bucks that started as end runs. Anything within the rules that would confuse the opponent was Jumbo's style. He was sophisticated beyond his time.

To achieve the timing necessary to pull off such plays, Stiehm's practices had to be sullen and precise. And they were; he saw to that. Jumbo was, simply, a dictator. If a player did not carry out his instructions punctually and precisely, he suffered. You did not cross Jumbo Stiehm without paying a price. No nonsense was tolerated.

But all the hard work paid off. For in his five years as head coach, from 1911 to 1915, Jumbo's teams were fearfully successful. They won thirty-five games, lost two, and tied

three, and won all five Missouri Valley Conference championships.

And dominating the Missouri Valley Conference so thoroughly at that time was no simply accomplished feat. The competition was excellent. Besides Nebraska, the league was composed of Kansas State, Kansas, Iowa State, Missouri, Washington University of St. Louis, Drake, and, before it withdrew to enter the Big Nine in 1912 when an application by Nebraska was once again rejected, Iowa.

In 1911, Stiehm's first year at the helm, the Cornhuskers tied with Iowa State for the championship. Both teams finished with 2-0-1 records in league play, and each scored sixty-nine points while allowing six.

Stiehm debuted that year rather auspiciously. In its last game under King Cole, Nebraska beat Haskell by the astonishing score of 119-0. In its first game under Jumbo Stiehm, Nebraska did almost as well. The opposition this time was Kearney Normal, and the final score was an equally astonishing 117-0. In the second game, against league foe Kansas State, the Cornhuskers maintained a similar pace and won by a more modest but nonetheless overwhelming 59-0.

The next week, the Huskers absorbed their first and only loss of the 1911 campaign. The victor, naturally, was Minnesota in Minneapolis, and the score was 21-3. But the Huskers, led by fullback Len Purdy, halfback Owen Frank, and tackle Sylvester Shonka, recovered in fine fashion.

Coming off the defeat by Minnesota, they scored their third shutout of the season, 34-0 over Missouri. They followed that with a tie of Iowa State and whitewashes of Doane and Kansas.

The final game of the season was played before a full house of 8,000 at Nebraska Field against Michigan on November 25. According to reports of the day, special trains filled with fans came into Lincoln from Kansas City, Omaha, Denver, and Des Moines. They came to see the tough young Cornhuskers play the veteran, nationally renowned Wolverines

52 THE CORNHUSKERS

of Fielding Hurry-Up Yost, who not too many years before had hung his hat each night in Lincoln. The game was a standoff at 6-6 and Yost lavished praise on Stiehms team. He called it better than Pennsylvania, the eastern leader, which Michigan had defeated 11-9 the previous week.

The Michigan tie was just a beginning. In 1912, the Cornhuskers rolled over seven of their eight opponents with ease, and gained undisputed possession of the league title. There was a nagging loss, though. It was the inevitable one. To Minnesota, and by a score of 13-0. It ruined an otherwise perfect season.

But while the Huskers were losing that game, they were already preparing for their revenge; the revenge they would get in 1913. Owen Frank, who had graduated to a position as an assistant coach, took pictures of that Minnesota game, and by the time the Cornhuskers opened their 1908 season against the Golden Gophers, Stiehms had made certain they were prepared for every possibility. The preparation paid off.

Led by linemen Clint Rose, another great black player in an era when there were very few, and Vic Halligan, who was Nebraska's first All-American, and by halfbacks Len Purdy and Dick Rutherford as well as quarterback Max Towle, the Huskers beat Minnesota on Nebraska Field.

Minnesota's attack was spearheaded by fullback Clark Shaughnessy and halfback Bernie Bierman, both of whom would become fiery, innovative coaches. Though it ended in a scoreless tie, Minnesota completely dominated the first half, and realists expected that they would dominate the second in similar fashion and finally put some points on the board.

But somehow, miraculously, it was Nebraska that started to pick up the pace as the third quarter came to an end. The Huskers started to drive from mid-field. First, Rutherford completed a pass to Purdy down to the Gopher 35. Then another pass, this one from Warren Howard to Halligan, added another 15 yards. The next play was also a pass. It was called by Towle, the field general, and he was to throw it.

After looking long and hard at right end Guy Mastin, who was streaking straight down the field, Towle unloaded a pass that seemed woefully short for left end Gordon Beck, who was running what is now called a post pattern. Beck, however, was able to come back from the end zone, grab the ball, break three tackles, and return to score a touchdown. The seven points were all the Huskers needed and all they got as they held on to blank the Gophers.

The Huskers then zipped through the rest of their season, shutting out four more opponents before allowing the first points of their season, and finished 1913 with an impressive 8-0 record.

And while the varsity was doing that, the freshman team was terrorizing its opposition, too. That's because the freshman team was led by a young man who would become one of the greatest players in the history of Nebraska football. A man who would become widely and simply referred to as The Champ. He was a handsome man with a soft face and intense light eyes. His name was Berlin Guy Chamberlin, and he was Nebraska's first big-time football star.

Guy Chamberlin was six feet, one inch tall and weighed 190 pounds. It is alleged he could carry that bulk, in full football gear, across 100 yards in 10 seconds flat, which would be remarkable even today. When Chamberlin came out of Blue Springs and Beatrice to Lincoln as a high school graduate, he enrolled at Nebraska Wesleyan University, the small school across town. After he ran wild in his freshman year at Wesleyan, the big school started to express interest in Guy. Because there was no NCAA, and thus no rules against tampering, the Cornhuskers focused a full-scale recruiting effort, one that would do these times proud, on Chamberlin. Players started paying frequent visits to the Chamberlin family farm to tell Guy how great the fame and fortune was that awaited him at the University of Nebraska. He listened, but he paid no heed, and returned to Wesleyan for his sophomore year. He led the team to its second straight state college title, but that left no

more worlds to conquer in the small college business. Guy Chamberlin headed across town.

So in 1913, Chamberlin sat out the year on the freshman team. But he made his presence felt. He was a superstar in the practices, regularly embarrassing the varsity players. And Jumbo Stiehm was appreciative of his talents.

"Chamberlin is a wonderful player," he said, "with a combination of speed, weight and aggressiveness. He can plunge through the almost unmovable line, skirt the best of ends or stop the most terrific runners while on defense. He has a quick head and is shifty enough to take advantage of every opportunity. He will make a good running mate for Rutherford."

So optimism was the by-word as everyone looked forward zealously to the 1914 season. "If everything breaks right," Stiehm said, "and there is no reason why everything should not, Nebraska should annex another Valley championship."

Everything broke right in the first game, as Rutherford, an excellent runner in his own right, moved over to blocking back as Chamberlin, though scoreless, led the Huskers to a 14-7 victory over Washburn. In the second game, the Huskers wound up playing a scoreless tie with an unheralded South Dakota team. It was a South Dakota team that had practiced for six weeks of the summer in central Wisconsin and aroused the suspicions of a Nebraska reporter who had a short memory about the acquisition of Chamberlin.

"They are a band of habitual football players," he wrote, "who, in patriotic persistence, deferred the day of graduation for the purpose of putting South Dakota on the football map."

In the meantime, Stiehm and Chamberlin would continue on their merry way to putting Nebraska right smack in the middle of the football map. After that slight derailment caused by South Dakota, they got back on the track next week against Kansas State as Chamberlin scored his first three Nebraska touchdowns, and the Cornhuskers won 31-0. They continued winning, and in the second to last game, before



Berlin Guy Chamberlin, All-American end, 1915

another packed house, they played Kansas for that Valley championship that Stiehm had so brazenly predicted would eventually be theirs.

They won the game easily, 35-0, as Chamberlin racked up four more touchdowns, and impressed the redoubtable Walter Eckersall, who had hung up his cleats for a role as a referee and All-American selector. After he officiated that Kansas game, Eckersall lavished the Huskers, who finished 7-0-1, with praise.

"The Cornhuskers are an astonishing team," he said. "I'm sure the Missouri Valley region has never seen the equal of this year's Nebraska eleven. I should like to see the Cornhuskers

pitted against Harvard or any of the leading eastern teams, and my pick would be Nebraska."

They probably would have been his pick again the next year, too. For in 1915, as Chamberlin and Rutherford wound up their careers, the Huskers finished 8-0.

The biggest game of that 1915 season was the fourth, when Notre Dame came to face the Huskers before a crowd of more than 8,000, including many dignitaries, in Lincoln's Nebraska Field. Nebraska came into the game 3-0, having beaten Drake, Washburn, and Kansas State by a composite 126-14. The Irish came into the game one of the great national powers under coach Jesse C. Harper, having beaten Alma and Haskell by a combined 64-0 and having suffered only two defeats in the previous four seasons.

Before the first match-up of these two proud powers, Harper dispatched a young assistant to scout Nebraska in its game against Kansas State. His name was Knute Rockne, and in his scouting report was this comment: "Chamberlin never cuts back. Once he heads for an end, he skirts the end no matter what."

Armed with that misinformation, the Fighting Irish stormed onto the playing field. Quickly, the Irish took a 6-0 lead. After receiving the ensuing kickoff, the Huskers had the ball on their own 20-yard line. Chamberlin's number was called. He took the ball and headed wide, for his right end. The Notre Dame defense played to contain. They knew Chamberlin was going wide no matter what. Rockne had told them that. But suddenly, Chamberlin cut back to his left. The Irish were stunned. The Champ romped 80 yards untouched into the end zone. Tim Corey's extra point kick gave Nebraska a 7-6 lead. Chamberlin would score once more, and the game would be tied 13-13, but Nebraska scored again, Corey kicked the extra point, and the Huskers held on to win 20-19.

The Huskers went on to escape the rest of that 1915 season unscathed. They would only give up seven more points in a 52-7 final game romp over Iowa. The game was a fitting finale

for the great Chamberlin. He scored four touchdowns, three on runs of 45, 60, and 40 yards, and the fourth on the last play of his college career when he was on the receiving end of a long pass. He then packed his gear and went off for professional ball with the Canton Bulldogs, Chicago Staleys, and Frankfort Yellowjackets.

No one expected at the time, though, that the game would also be a fitting Nebraska finale for Jumbo Stiehm. But it was.

After the season ended, Indiana University came calling, and offered Jumbo a \$1,000 raise to \$4,500 a year. That was quite a raise to a man who only five years earlier had been making \$2,000 for the entire year. The athletic association didn't want to lose Stiehm. He had been their greatness, for he was not only head football coach, but athletic director, too. A raise was offered, and Stiehm agreed to stay in Lincoln for \$4,250 per year. When such a proposal was made to the faculty, it balked. It would not stand for the football coach making more than any professor was making.

The faculty had been increasingly exercising its influence over athletics ever since that ill-advised five-day trek to a loss in Butte, Montana outraged them. And in this confrontation over Stiehm's paycheck, they won another battle, although you have to wonder if the victory wasn't anything but Pyrrhic.

Anyway, Stiehm packed up and left for Indiana and obscurity. The Hoosiers have never been very strong in football, and not even Jumbo could produce greatness for them. He coached there through 1921, accumulating a record of 20-18-1. And in 1922, he died of cancer at the age of 35.

But Jumbo Stiehm left behind a legacy at Nebraska and a precedent that would be followed eventually if not just after his departure. While Bummy Booth had engendered great success against mediocre opposition, Stiehm had achieved his remarkable record against the finest opposition all of college football could offer. And so it would be, in defeat and victory: Nebraska football was big time.

4

The Torch Flickers

When Jumbo Stiehm departed for the larger paychecks of Indiana, it was time to find another coach. This time, the torch of Nebraska football leadership was passed to a man from the West. He was E. J. (Doc) Stewart and he came to Lincoln after a stint at Oregon State.

Doc Stewart was a football coach with some strange ideas of what the game was all about — or so it seemed to the partisans of the Cornhuskers. Those fans had, in the five years of greatness, grown accustomed to the football of Stiehm. The intellectual style of play that depended not only on strength but on great athletes executing perfectly and deceptively.

Doc Stewart, on the other hand, depended almost entirely on the skills of his great athletes. There was little room for anything fancy, but there was a lot of room for change.

"No quarterback," Doc Stewart told his Cornhuskers when he took over in 1916. "There will be two halfbacks and two fullbacks. The center calls the signals, and he doesn't bend over the ball. He stands sideways, and passes the ball directly to the ball carrier."

There would be no more end runs that started as line bucks and no more line bucks that started as end runs. Doc Stewart was getting back to fundamentals. He was getting so far back in fundamentals that his revolutionary style would, in time, be just another reactionary aberration. The only thing that saved Doc Stewart from terrible disaster was that Jumbo Stiehm left him a

60 THE CORNHUSKERS

fine collection of players.

Doc Stewart, who had somehow been quite successful at Oregon State, won more of his games than he lost at Nebraska mostly because he had players of the likes of Johnny Cook, Hugo Otoupalik, Dusty Rhodes, and Tim Corey, who had beaten Notre Dame with his toe.

Doc's Cornhuskers opened their 1916 season like the old Stiehm Rollers, trouncing Drake 53-0. And then they went on to win their next four games over Kansas State, Oregon State, Wesleyan, and Iowa State. But then, as the opposition toughened, the Huskers weakened. Kansas dumped them 7-3, they got by Iowa 34-17, and then lost their season finale to Notre Dame 20-0. So they finished the season 6-2; if Jumbo had been at the helm, they undoubtedly would have finished better.

The next year began like it might turn into something great. Wesleyan fell 100-0, and then Iowa 47-0. The third week was a great test against Jesse Harper's last Notre Dame squad. The Cornhuskers were able to win that one by a shutout, too. 7-0. But the rest of the season brought a split. There were victories over Missouri and Kansas and losses to Michigan and Syracuse. That year, as in the previous one, the Huskers wound up at the top of the Missouri Valley.

But then World War I came and took Doc Stewart. He never returned to Nebraska. Mercifully, quarterbacks did.

But with the return of bending centers and quarterbacks there also came a war-shortened schedule. The Huskers, under Paul Schissler and Bill Kline, who had been a running back and hurdler at Illinois, couldn't even manage to win half their games. They finished 2-3-1, beating Kansas and the Omaha Balloon School, and playing a tough scoreless tie with the first Notre Dame team coached by Knute Rockne, who was to show considerably more lasting power than Schissler and Kline, and starring George Gipp.

By the next fall, Schissler and Kline were gone. Nebraska's athletic association was intent on winning big again in football. The administrators looked around and plucked a man out of

their own conference. He was Henry Frank (Indian) Schulte, who was hired to coach football and track and field.

Schulte turned out to be many things for the Cornhuskers. He was, for instance, a brilliant public relations man. He was given credit for drawing the interest of many Nebraskans to Cornhusker athletics. He was a beloved man. He was a very fine and successful track coach. And he turned out to be a remarkable line coach.

But in his two seasons in charge of the Nebraska football team, Indian Schulte did not turn out to be one very important thing—a great head football coach.

In his first season in charge, 1919, Schulte's team could do no better than a 3-3-2 record, and it had to scramble to achieve that mark. In the opener, the Huskers lost to Iowa 18-0. The next week they lost to Gipp and Rockne again, 14-9. Then there were the two ties, with Minnesota and Oklahoma, followed by a loss to Iowa State. Never had a Nebraska football team gotten so far along into the season without winning a game. Even in the 2-7-1 season of 1899, the Huskers won their opening game against Lincoln High.

But the Cornhuskers were able to come back and salvage the year by beating Missouri, Kansas, and Syracuse in succession.

The next season started better, and after five games, Nebraska had won four. The only loss was, of course, to Rockne and Gipp, this time by a score of 16-7. But in the final four games Schulte's team could do no better than beat Michigan State, tie Kansas, and lose to Penn State and Washington State. That left the Huskers with an 8-6-3 record in two years under Schulte.

Clearly, something had to be done. If the twenties were going to be at all roaring for football fans in Nebraska, a new coach with a new determination for success was going to have to be found.

In Fred T. Dawson, the administrators thought they found their man.



Fred T. Dawson, Nebraska coach, 1921-1924

5

The Golden Age and a New Stage

Fred T. Dawson was a man who looked out at the world from squinting quizzical eyes. His face was a craggy melange of deep, distinctive lines, framed by a hat cocked invariably to his left and a proper bit of white at the temples. His nose was a prominent one, zigzagging down his face, marked by the lumps of football that were inevitable in those days of leather skull-caps, when a face mask was something that doctors wore in the operating room.

To get Dawson, Nebraska officials once again looked east. The coach came to them from Princeton when his doctor told him that the clear, crisp air of the plains would be just the thing to help his health, which was prematurely and erratically faltering at the age of 37.

So Dawson came west from Princeton and intended to stay. He was a product of Union College, a small elite school in Schenectady, New York, and of Columbia University of New York City, which is now one of the universities that composes the prestigious Ivy League. Like Bummy Booth, Dawson was a

product of his environment. He was a cultured, aristocratic type of fellow. He was eloquent and dynamic. He was a man of great forensic skill, and he didn't shy away from employing that skill in a football situation. He was a great believer in the value of the enthusiastic halftime oration. If he had been in the same situation, there is no question that he would have delivered the famous "Win one for the Gipper" speech that Knute Rockne delivered to his troops in that Army game.

There was no question, either, that Fred Dawson was hired by administrators who had but one thing in mind: winning. They would tolerate nothing less, it seemed, than a return of Nebraska football to the glory that it knew under Bummy Booth and Jumbo Stiehm.

Everything—ideas, motivations—was changing very quickly and abruptly in America during this time in history. Just two years before, the Great World War, the "War to End All Wars," had concluded, and because its help was the decisive blow in the defeat of the Kaiser, America was just coming to the realization that it was the greatest power in the world.

The twenties were to be an era of good times. A time to flex the muscles and generate national spirit. It was also a time to find great national heroes. America, one of the few societies without a monarchy, really had no national heroes until the 1920s. Now it was finding them under every turned stone.

And one of the turned stones was the one labeled sports. Athletes were to be heroes, something bigger than life. They were the real-life characters that all our great actors portrayed in the talking pictures. It was the Golden Age of Sports.

It was the age of Babe Ruth, the great, brusque, hard-drinking man who became our eternal hero. Of Lou Gehrig, his quiet, educated, superb teammate who died young and became our tragic hero. It was a time for Red Grange to run wild on the gridiron and for a wizened young man named George Halas to capitalize on it. It was a time for Bobby Jones and Bill Tilden, two American amateurs, to dominate the more refined international sporting scenes of golf and tennis.

It was a time, simply, that the University of Nebraska yearned to be a part of. It wanted to produce its own national heroes. Just like Rockne was doing at that little Catholic school in Indiana called Notre Dame, just like Bob Zuppke was doing at that great flatlands state school, the University of Illinois, just like Pop Warner had been doing at Carlisle and now Pittsburgh.

Nebraska wanted a piece of that action, and Fred Dawson strode into the demanding situation where he had to get it. Fast.

And in his first season, the Cornhuskers started to horn right in on that Golden Age.

Despite his eloquence and refined background, which presented a sharp contrast to his line coach and predecessor, Indian Schulte, who was the product of his environment as a tough, terrific guard for Fielding Yost's powerful Michigan teams, Dawson was a devotee of rugged, simple, straight-ahead, power football. His was a style that depended greatly on the tough lines molded by Schulte.

In one of his first talks to his new squad, Dawson, speaking intently through taut lips, said: "Three yards! Three yards! Three yards! Just give me those three yards every time you carry that damn ball!"

They paid attention, and they got him those three yards and much more in that first season, 1921.

The Huskers, coming off that disappointing 5-3-1 1920 season, inaugurated the Dawson era against Wesleyan. Led by Clarence Swanson, the stately captain and end who would become a prominent Lincoln businessman and a distinguished member of the university Athletic Board and Board of Regents, the Huskers rolled over Wesleyan 55-0. Next they went up against the Haskell Indians, and scored another shutout victory, this time by 41 points.

In the third game came the big test of the year. The true test of Dawson and his players. An October 22 trip to South Bend, Indiana, to meet Notre Dame. The young series had

already become a great rivalry, and Nebraskans were hungry for a victory. The Huskers hadn't beaten the Fighting Irish since Stiehm's last team turned the trick 20-19 in their first meeting, when Rockne miscalculated Guy Chamberlin's ability. But victory wasn't meant to be in this year either, and Rockne's team held on for a difficult 7-0 win. It was the only loss the Cornhuskers suffered all year in eight games. But it wasn't their only big game.

For on that 1921 schedule there was also a game with one of the greatest eastern powers, Pop Warner's Pittsburgh. A victory over the Panthers would do the Cornhuskers well in their search for national recognition. And an impressive triumph over the Panthers is what they were able to get. It was by a 10-0 score and the Cornhuskers were so awesomely physical that afternoon that one Pittsburgh writer called them "man-killing mastodons." The Huskers got their points on a pass from fullback Chick Hartley to Swanson and on a field goal by Glen Preston. At the season's end, when the Panthers chose their all-opponent team, four Nebraskans were named—Swanson, Hartley, tackle Link Lyman, and guard John Pucelik.

The next season, 1922, more of the stuff that drove the over-zealous Pittsburgh reporter to describe the Cornhuskers as "man-killing mastodons" could be expected. Clarence Swanson had graduated and embarked on his successful business career. But Swanson was just about all that was lost. Glen Preston and Chick Hartley, who was named captain, were back, and they were joined by a flock of All-Missouri Valley Conference performers, such as tackles Bub Weller and Adolph Wenke, end Leo Scherer, guard Joy Berquist and, in the backfield, the 200-pound sprinter, "Big Moose" Dave Noble.

The season started out with three resounding triumphs over South Dakota, Missouri and Oklahoma. But then in the fourth game, the Huskers came upon an unexpected road-block to a perfect season. On a muddy, chilling day, Syracuse upset the Cornhuskers 9-6. But the Huskers bounced back to beat Kansas, Kansas State, and Iowa State.



Roy "Link" Lyman, Nebraska Football Hall of Fame

That set up the big game. The last game ever to be played in Nebraska Field, for the next fall, the Cornhuskers would move into their palatial new estate, Memorial Stadium. The opponent that final game was, appropriately enough, Notre Dame. Rockne had a good team that year. Coming into the November 30 season finale, the Fighting Irish had an 8-0-1 record. The only blot on their mark was a scoreless tie with Army on November 11.

Sixteen thousand people jammed the wooden bleachers of Nebraska Field on that last day of November and as many as 5,000 stood upon giant coal piles that stood around the field. Another 1,000 climbed trees, poles, stood on rooftops, and even clambered up the scaffolding of Memorial Stadium that was growing just over the north end zone.

It was a setting that demanded a brilliant display; nothing short of excellence by the Cornhuskers could be accepted on that day. And excellence is what Nebraska provided.

Notre Dame lost the coin toss, and kicked off. The Cornhuskers took the ball and immediately set the pace for the afternoon. Methodically and ruggedly, they marched through the Notre Dame defense, which yielded yards and points reluctantly, having allowed just 13 points to this juncture all season. The march came down to the Irish one-yard line, but somehow they became their unyielding, stubborn selves, and refused to allow the Huskers to advance the ball one inch farther on four tries.

The Huskers turned the ball over to Notre Dame's potent offense, but Nebraska's defense turned out to be recalcitrant, too. Notre Dame couldn't manage much on three downs, and on the fourth it punted the ball. It was a fine kick, and the Huskers had to start again on their own 25-yard line. This time they were not to be denied, though, and Hartley put Nebraska on the scoreboard first when he wriggled through the Irish defense for a five-yard touchdown. Hartley was also involved in Nebraska's second touchdown. In the second period, he threw a 40-yard scoring pass to Noble, who had to break a couple of

tackles before arriving at paydirt. Those 14 points were quite enough for the Huskers. The defense turned out to be stubborn all day, and Notre Dame's only score came on a late touchdown pass.

It was an appropriate game to bid adieu to Nebraska Field, which had seen so much greatness. And it seemed to be just the beginning for Fred Dawson, who in two years had managed a 14-2 record and won two straight Missouri Valley championships.

But somehow, things started to go wrong for Fred Dawson. Wrong just at the time they most had to go right. Wrong when the most people were looking. Wrong when the Huskers moved into their new showplace, their pride, their joy, their new stage — Memorial Stadium, which even today is one of the finest collegiate football facilities in the nation.

One of the clearest indications that collegiate football was a major business as well as a major medium of entertainment by the 1920s was the mania to build new stadia on campuses.

This construction compulsion was made manifest everywhere during the decade. More likely than not it was just a part of the more general construction mania, a desire for tangible signs of growth and positive action that sweeps any technologically sophisticated country after it wreaks the havoc and destruction of war.

It was manifest, for instance, in the Big Ten. Illinois built its 71,227-seat Memorial Stadium in 1923. Iowa's 60,000-seat edifice was opened in 1929. Monstrous Michigan Stadium, holding 101,701, was finished in 1927. Michigan State's 76,000-seat Spartan Stadium was first used in 1923. Minnesota also built a stadium in tribute to the war dead, and it was done in 1924. Northwestern's Dyche opened in 1926, Ohio Stadium was first used in 1922, Purdue's Ross-Ade Stadium was completed in 1924.

The same pattern was followed by most of the schools that currently constitute the Big Eight Conference. Iowa State's Clyde Williams Field was built in 1922. Oklahoma State's Lewis

70 THE CORNHUSKERS

Stadium was first constructed in 1920. Kansas followed with Memorial Stadium in 1921. And in 1924, both Colorado and Oklahoma dedicated new stadia. Missouri did likewise with Faurot Field in 1926.

In 1923, the new stadium market in the Missouri Valley Conference belonged solely to defending league champion Nebraska. Ever since the Armistice that ended World War I in 1919, officials of the university had been seeking a way to build a stadium that would honor the state's war dead. But the legislature was only willing to provide a very minimal amount of the precious tax funds for a proposition many of the politicians considered dubious at best. The financial support, obviously, was going to have to come from elsewhere. And that meant only one thing. University officials were going to have to try and raise the funds from Nebraska football fans. The money-raising drive, needless to say, was a great success.

Fans from Lincoln, who would stand to benefit the most financially by a successful program at the university, kicked in with the most. They donated \$176,000. Students gave \$122,000, and their teachers another \$25,000. Partisans from Omaha helped out with a total of \$40,000, fans from the rest of Nebraska kicked in \$60,000, and, surprisingly, patrons from out of the state added a total of \$25,000.

Without much trouble, the university was able to build a double-decked showpiece of a coliseum. And it was ready for the 1923 season with just some work on the upper levels remaining to be done when the dedication game was played.

The first game of that season, which would turn out to be a disappointment, was on the road, dedicating someone else's new stadium — the University of Illinois' cavernous own Memorial Stadium.

That September Saturday was a very fine one for the University of Illinois. The dedication came off without a hitch, and a new star was born. He was a sophomore from Wheaton, Illinois, a suburb about thirty miles west of Chicago. In time, the sophomore would come to be known as the Wheaton

Iceman or the Galloping Ghost, but on this day they referred to him simply as Red Grange, number 77. Grange, playing his first varsity game, scored three touchdowns, on runs of 35, 60, and twelve yards, and Illinois won the game easily, 24-7. The next game turned out better for the Cornhuskers, as they traveled to Norman to face Oklahoma. They turned back the Sooners without much trouble, 24-0.

Finally, the Cornhuskers were ready to come home and dedicate their new stadium. Dedication day was a sunny October Saturday. Governor Charley Bryan, William Jennings' brother, was among the crowd of 20,000 that filled the lower sections, and he performed the honors. They worked out fine, but there wasn't such luck with the game. Kansas was the opponent, and it was outplayed badly by the inspired Cornhuskers. But each time they had to, the Jayhawks rose to the occasion, and four times they were able to prevent Nebraska from scoring from within the Kansas one-yard line. They returned to Lawrence, satisfied in the knowledge that they spoiled the Nebraska dedication with a scoreless tie. The crowd that day was a new Nebraska record, but soon 20,000 would seem a paltry amount, because when the balconies were finally completed, the Stadium held 31,000.

The scoreless tie with Kansas was disappointing, but as things turned out the rest of the season, quite appropriate. The next week, the Huskers tied Missouri. After that, they lost to Syracuse and beat Iowa State and Kansas State. All in all, a very mediocre season. Except for one other game. The fourth win in the 4-2-2 year.

It came on November 10 before a crowd of 30,000 in Memorial Stadium. The visitor's name was Notre Dame. It was a Notre Dame team that would finish the season 9-1, outscoring its opponents 275-37; it was a Notre Dame team that would capture the imagination of fans everywhere; it was a team with a backfield that, one year later, would, with the help of an ingenious public relations man named George Strickler, inspire Grantland Rice to write the most famous newspaper

72 THE CORNHUSKERS

sports lead of all time:

POLO GROUNDS, N.Y., OCT. 18, 1924—Out-lined against a blue-gray October sky, the Four Horsemen rode again. In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Sudden Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden.

Yes, Nebraska, decidedly mediocre Nebraska, beat the Four Horsemen of Notre Dame, juniors Don Miller, Harry Stuhldreher, Jim Crowley, and Elmer Layden. The Huskers beat them 14-7, with both the touchdowns being scored by Dave Noble, the Big Moose. He got the first on a 34-yard off-tackle run, and the second on a pass from Rufe Dewitz. Herb Dewitz kicked both extra points. But the best Nebraska player on the field that day was an obscure tackle from Superior, Nebraska, about whom little was known.

It was the last time little was know about him, because by the time he went on to play for the Frankfort Yellowjackets, he had become a legend, a player as great as even Guy Chamberlin. He was Nebraska's third All-American, and the only one ever to make the famed Walter Camp's teams.

His name was Ed Weir, and he was a superb athlete. When he was just an eighth grader, he was starting on the varsity team of Superior High School. All through his extended high school career, Weir was a fullback. But when he showed up in Lincoln, the Huskers were well fixed at that spot. So he was switched to tackle, and with the help of Indian Schulte, he became one of the all-time greats. He would impress even the redoubtable Rockne with his sterling, instinctive play, which was not unlike that of Rich Glover, the famed middle guard of another era. He so impressed Rockne that after the Four Horsemen gained their revenge in 1924 with a 34-6 public mugging, Knute came into the Husker locker room to personally commend Weir for his performance. "That was the greatest exhibition of play I have ever seen," Rockne said. "There never



Ed Weir, All-American tackle, 1924, 1925

was anything like it."

That loss to Notre Dame in 1924 was just one of the three suffered by the Huskers in eight games. The other two were to Oklahoma and, once again, to Grange and Illinois.

University administrators would not tolerate such mediocrity, and Dawson, despite the fact that he claimed all or a share of the Missouri Valley championship in three of his four years, was asked to resign. He was a proud man, but he acceded, and once again there was a search for a football coach in Lincoln.

Once again, the gaze was set to the East, but this time not quite so far. The administrators' eyes settled in Champaign, Illinois, the home of Bob Zuppke's Fighting Illini, who had so handily dispatched the Huskers the two previous seasons.

Zuppke, of course, was unavailable, but he recommended his handsome young protégé, Elmer Ernest Bearg, and Bearg was found acceptable. Bearg was a coach who stressed fundamentals. His teams practiced blocking and tackling unremittingly. He scorned guile and deception. He had no use for them. His game depended almost entirely on brute strength.

Bearg inherited a decent amount of talent when he got to Lincoln in the fall of 1925. Joining tackle Ed Weir, who was captaining the squad for the second year in a row, were tackle Lonnie Stiner, Ed's younger brother Joe at end, and center Harold Hutchinson. And in their first game, they did quite well.

The game was, ironically enough, against Illinois in Champaign, and the Illini were led by Grange, who was beginning his senior season. For two years, the vanquished Huskers could find no way to stop Grange, but Bearg obviously knew some secrets that Fred Dawson could never have hoped to know. Led by Ed Weir, the Nebraskans stopped the heroic Grange cold. They forced him into his most embarrassing and frustrating day as a collegian. He was held to an astonishing minus 40 yards rushing. And the Cornhuskers were able to win their first game for Ernie Bearg, 14-0.

The rest of the season, though, the sweet moments were few and far between. Going into the last game of the season, the Huskers had only managed two more victories to go with their losses and two ties.

Somehow, though, that first team of Bearg's was able to rise to the really momentous occasion. It played well in the big game.

On Thanksgiving Day, November 26, in Memorial Stadium before an overflowing crowd of 45,000, they played that kind of big game. The opponent was Notre Dame. It was not one of Knute Rockne's great Notre Dame teams, finishing with a record of just 7-2-1, but, still, it was Notre Dame.

The game was Ed Weir's last one, and he made sure it was a great one. After the Cornhuskers faltered in their first posses-

sion, Weir punted. The ball went all the way down to the Irish four-yard line. They couldn't advance it against the fiery Nebraskans and were forced to punt. The ball was deflected and it went out on the seven-yard line. Three plays after that, Nebraska took a 7-0 lead. On its next possession, Nebraska scored again. And it held onto the 14-0 margin into the halftime. The Huskers didn't go flat in the locker room, and they came out in the second half to hold Notre Dame scoreless and add three points to their total for a 17-0 triumph.

Weir had been superb, and though it was his last day in uniform, it wasn't his last day on a Nebraska playing field. He returned to Lincoln later to assist with the football team, and wound up as the head track coach. And in 1974, twenty years after his retirement, Nebraska's new track stadium was dedicated as Ed Weir Field just before the Big Eight championships were run on it.

The next couple of years, Bearg did well enough, and his teams improved their records to 6-2 in both 1926 and 1927. They were teams that featured stars like Glenn Presnell, Arnold Oelrich, George Farley, Blue Howell, Ted James, Dan McMullen, Elmer Holm, Ray Richards, Cliff Ashburn, and Ray Randels.

They were teams that did well, quite well, on the whole, but they were also teams that were unable to capture the Missouri Valley conference title. They were unimaginative teams, teams that forsook the fake and feint, and teams that fell both years to the deception of Gwinn Henry's Missouri Tigers, who were the conference champs in 1925 and 1927.

Husker partisans were getting annoyed at this failure. They had no love for Bearg, who was little good at public relations and refused to pander to the powerful and influential downtown Lincoln merchants, and they didn't care much for his style of play. They put the pressure on him, and he in turn promised to produce in 1928. He promised the fans a conference championship. If he got it for them, it would be the first championship of a new conference.



Dan McMullen, All-American guard, 1928

On May 19, 1928 in Lincoln, six of the seven state schools in the Missouri Valley Conference seceded. Oklahoma State was the only school that remained. The six that rebelled were Kansas, Kansas State, Iowa State, Missouri, Oklahoma, and, of course, Nebraska. The six schools formed something called the Missouri Valley Intercollegiate Athletic Association. The name was too long to fit in a headline, and its acronym, MVIAA, wasn't appealing. So the group simply became known as the Big Six. In 1947, the University of Colorado made it the Big Seven when it left the Skyline Conference, and in 1957, the last holdout, Oklahoma State, rejoined its old mates to form what is now perhaps the most formidable football conference in the land—the Big Eight.

Ernie Bearg's job was to make good on his promise—win the Big Six title—and keep himself from being on the rolls of the unemployed, rolls that would expand many-fold the next year when the Great Depression hit with the stock market crash of 1929.

With the help of Blue Howell, Clair Sloan, and Lafayette R. (Reb) Russell, for six games it seemed like Bearg would do exactly as he had promised. The Cornhuskers' insistent, dull running attack was relentlessly successful. On successive Saturdays it drove right through Iowa State, Montana State, Syracuse, Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma. Russell was terrific. He was a sophomore transfer student from Kansas State, and he was devastating each opponent.

Until, before 25,000 fans in Memorial Stadium, Pittsburgh, coached by Jock Sutherland, was the opponent. No one was devastating in that game, and it wound up an unmercifully dull scoreless battle of punters. The club was still undefeated, but the fans were growing even more restless. They were paying good money to sit in Memorial Stadium on all those Saturdays, and they weren't being entertained.

But the next Saturday, when the Huskers went off to West Point to play Biff Jones' Army team, Bearg had a telegram from the Rose Bowl Committee of Pasadena, California in his

pocket. The telegram advised him that if Nebraska beat Army it would be invited to the Rose Bowl. Bearg knew something else. If Nebraska beat Army, that telegram also meant that there was no way Ernie Bearg wouldn't be Nebraska's coach in 1929. Much hung in the balance of that trip.

But Bearg, a stubborn man, would not change his mind about a decision he had made that week in practice. Reb Russell, a wild, married man, had broken training that week preceding the Army game, and Bearg had told him he would be benched. Everyone thought that by game time, Bearg would relent, and Russell, his best back, would be in the starting line-up.

Ernie Bearg was not a forgiving sort. And when the game started Russell found himself right where the coach had promised — on the bench.

In the first half it didn't seem to make much difference. Nebraska dominated. And thanks to a dropkicked field goal by Clair Sloan, the Huskers took a 3-0 halftime lead. The Rose Bowl was ever so close.

In the second half, though, after twice having to be helped off the field with injuries in the first half, Chris Cagle, one of West Point's all-time football greats, started to take command. On a fake pass play that was called after he successfully completed several tosses, Cagle eluded several potential Husker tacklers and scored the touchdown that gave Army a 7-3 lead. It was all the Cadets would need on that afternoon, but as the game neared its conclusion and darkness started to envelop Michie Stadium, the Black Knights of the Hudson added another six points for a 13-3 victory. Reb Russell never got in the game, and the next year he was off for Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he starred in his last two seasons of college football.

As he ran off the field, Ernie Bearg reached into his pocket, pulled out a telegram from California and crumpled it. The next week his team beat Kansas State 8-0, to clinch, as he had promised, the first Big Six championship. But Ernie

Bearg knew that his time had run out. Despite his gridiron success, he knew he could no longer defy his critics and continue to play his beloved pile-driving type of game.

So Ernie Bearg quit. He did it his way, or he didn't do it.

And so again the search for a new coach was on. This time, they looked to the South, where they came up with the perfect gentleman.



Dana X. Bible, Nebraska coach, 1929-1936

6

Biblical Times

Dana Xenophon Bible was the prototype of the courtly southern gentleman, for that was what he was raised to be.

He was born on October 8, 1891, in Jefferson City, Tennessee, the son of Jonathan and Cleopatra Bible. His father was a teacher of Latin and Greek in Jefferson City's public schools, and he encouraged Dana Xenophon to be a scholar of the classics, too. Dana abided by his father's wishes, and by the time he was done at Carson-Newman College, he was quite proficient at Latin and Greek.

But Dana was also a scholar of another sort. To him, Socrates, Aristotle, Caesar, and Cicero were fine and interesting; but Zuppke, Yost, Rockne, and Stagg were better and absolutely fascinating. Dana Xenophon Bible was also a scholar of the gridiron.

In his first job, he combined the two abilities. That was at Brandon Prep in Shelbyville, Tennessee, where he taught the classics in the morning and coached the football team in the afternoon.

82 THE CORNHUSKERS

He did so well in the afternoons, that within a few years he no longer had to do that morning work and was able to devote himself fully to football.

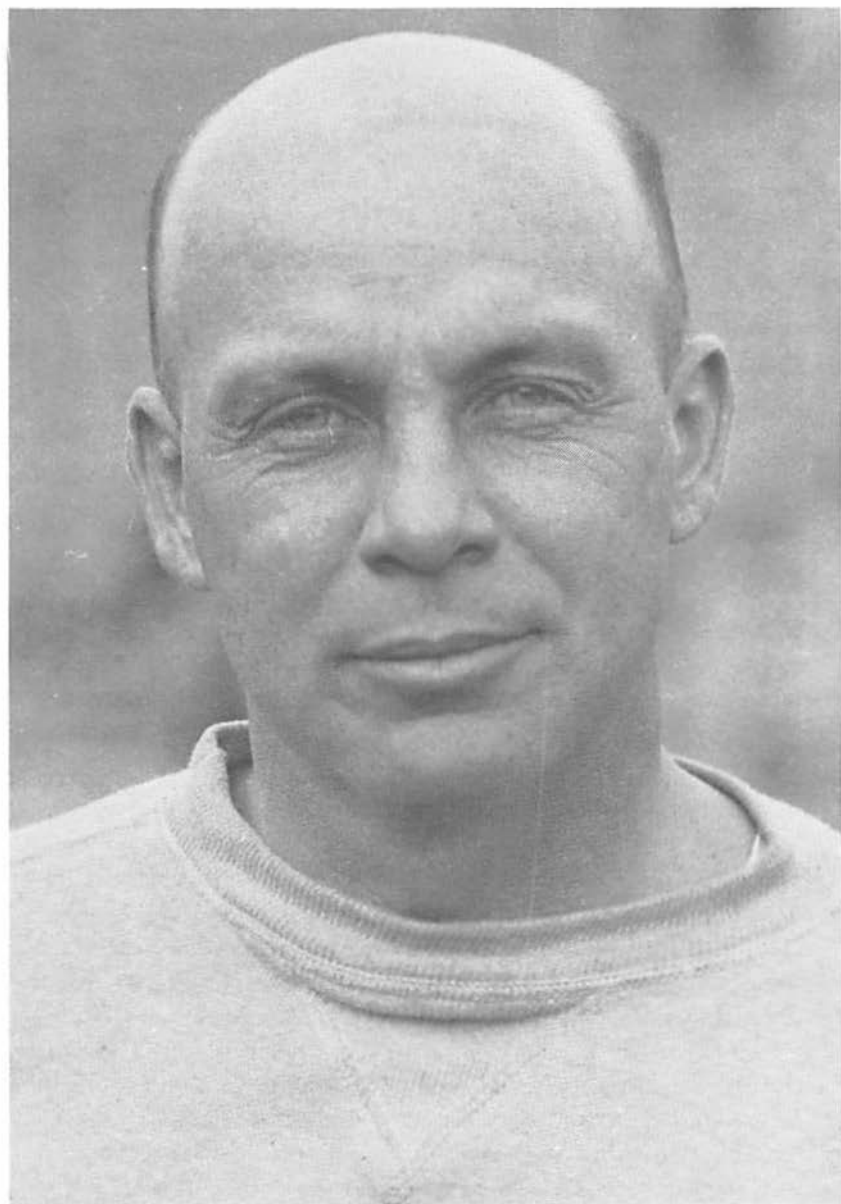
Mississippi College, looking for a football coach for the 1913 season, hired the ambitious 22-year-old. He did well, quite well, and after three superlative seasons, was offered the freshman team coaching position at Texas A&M University, which was a major football school.

Bible was only able to hold onto the yearling job at A&M for a half-season before he was offered his first varsity head coaching position. Louisiana State University's coach had quit with three games left on the schedule, and officials there asked Bible to complete the season as interim coach. He didn't do badly, either. Under him, the Tigers beat Ole Miss and tied Rice and arch rival Tulane.

That summer, 1917, both LSU and Texas A&M were looking for head coaches. Not surprisingly, both schools offered the job to Bible. It was a difficult decision for Bible to make, for he felt a certain allegiance to both schools. But he settled on A&M; he would have to make his mark on the football world from the lonely southwestern outpost of College Station.

"I felt a moral obligation to A&M," he would say later. "They had consented to let me go help out LSU, and now they wanted me back. I was delighted and honored." And Texas A&M was damn lucky. Because D. X. Bible would give it a string of football successes that many generations of successors have been unable to match.

Bible's impact was felt immediately in College Station. His 1917 squad was unbeaten and unscored upon in eight games. In 1918, he went off to fight in World War I. But in 1919 he returned and picked up exactly where he left off. The Aggies of that year went 10 games without losing and without relinquishing a single point. In 1920, it was more of the same for seven games, as six foes fell to shutouts, and one managed to hold the Aggies to a scoreless tie. But then, in the last game



Dana X. Bible, Nebraska coach, 1929-1936

of the season, against Texas, A&M allowed its first touchdown under D. X. Bible. And that touchdown was enough to cause their first defeat under Bible, as the Longhorns, who would some day flourish under Bible's rule, won the game 7-3. In those first three years as a major college head coach, getting paid a paltry \$2,400 per year, D. X. Bible had run up a remarkable record of 24-1-1.

He was never able to match that kind of success at Texas A&M again, but that doesn't mean he didn't do well. By the time he was ready to depart after 11 years' service, he had led the Aggies to five Southwest Conference championships, and had started to build quite a legend for himself. A legend built upon a plethora of anecdotes, such as the one about the 1922 Texas A&M-Texas game, which was played in Austin.

In the eight years of the Southwest Conference, the Aggies had never been able to win a game in Austin, and this rankled the demanding D. X. Finally, at halftime of the 1922 game, with the score tied at 7-7, Bible, a devoted tactician who was usually calm and collected, resorted to histrionics and Lone Star State history. At the defense of the Alamo, Col. William B. Travis drew a line in the dirt floor with a sword and told his outnumbered men that anyone who wanted to stay and defend the fort in San Antonio should cross the line. They all did, including Jim Bowie, who was ill and had to be carried over in his cot.

Now, on a concrete floor of a locker room in Austin, D. X. Bible drew an imaginary line with his shoe.

"Those of you," Bible said as the halftime came to a close, "who want to go out and be known as members of an A&M team that defeated Texas in Austin, step over this line."

There was a rush for the line, and Bible was almost trampled, but the ploy worked. The Aggies were stunning in the second half, and they beat the Longhorns 14-7. It was a style of halftime oration that Bible, a great gridiron psychologist, would recall in a later year and use to his advantage.

That later year would be when he was the coach of the

University of Nebraska football team, a position he first took over in the fall of 1929.

When representatives of the Cornhusker athletic department went looking for a coach after Bearg resigned following the 1928 season, they first went to Knute Rockne at Notre Dame. They offered Rockne the job, no questions asked. The Rock wasn't moving; there was no way he would leave South Bend, but he was willing to make a suggestion. He suggested that the men from the University of Nebraska look up one of his close friends, a man of whom they had heard little, a man named Dana Xenophon Bible. Rockne correctly suspected that D. X. had conquered all the worlds there were to conquer in College Station, and might be willing to accept a new challenge. He also knew two other things:

- that Dana really desired very much to coach at the University of Texas, but knew he would have to prove himself somewhere other than arch rival A&M before he would be acceptable to the Texas boosters;

- and that Bible wasn't altogether optimistic about the future at A&M. The Aggies had gone 8-0-1 in 1927, but they fell 5-4-1 in 1928, and Bible thought that was a realistic omen of what was to follow in College Station.

So a meeting with Bible was arranged. In early January of 1929, three members of the Nebraska athletic board, John K. Selleck, Clarence Swanson, and George Holmes, had a secret session with Bible in a Kansas City hotel room. They recommended him wholeheartedly to the whole board, and later that month, D. X. was invited to come to Lincoln for a meeting with the full athletic board. He was impressive. He was hired right then.

D. X. Bible proved his worth in his first season on the job. Ernie Bearg had left little behind from the team that almost made it to the Rose Bowl, except a monumental rebuilding job for Bible. Ray Richards, the All-American tackle, was the only player of note. But miraculously, in 1929, that Nebraska squad lost just one game, and captured its second consecutive

Big Six title. The Huskers opened the season with a scoreless tie with one of Bible's old Texas opponents, Southern Methodist. That was followed by a 13-6 victory over Syracuse. The third game brought the sole loss, and it was an inevitable one: Jock Sutherland's Pittsburgh Panthers, who would run up a 6-0-2 record against the Nebraska teams coached by Bible, scored a 12-7 win. The rest of the season was ties with Missouri and Oklahoma and wins over Kansas, Kansas State, and Iowa State.

The 1930 season was still another rebuilding year for the Huskers, and a more troublesome one. It ended with a 4-3-2 record, as Kansas, under H. W. Hargiss, won the league championship. But the year concluded with great optimism. For there was a wonderful fuzzy-cheeked future running rampant for the Huskers on their 1930 freshman team. It was a future that consisted of four boys named George Sauer, Bernie Masterson, Bruce Kilbourne, and Clair Bishop.

They were four boys who came to the University of Nebraska together from Lincoln High School, and they had the capital city buzzing. In the three years they played together at Lincoln High, they had never lost a home game. History would repeat itself.

The 1931 season began with an expected thumping of South Dakota by a score of 44-6. The fabulous sophomores played a little in that game, but accomplished nothing of note.

The second game was a markedly more difficult one. It was against Northwestern in Evanston, Illinois, and the Wildcats were pretty much of a power-house in those days. Northwestern dominated the early going decisively, and Bible decided to give his four promising sophomores a baptism under fire.

"We were playing Northwestern in Evanston, and I thought we were ready," Bible would recall later. "Our boys darned near broke down the door to get onto the field. But before we could stop them, Northwestern had three touchdowns in the first quarter. I decided I was going to give our sophomores a chance to play, and I ran them into the game.



Ray Richards, All-American tackle, 1929

They played most of it. They did so well, and Sauer especially, that a radio announcer giving the score that night referred to Northwestern's total as 19 and listed Nebraska's as 'Sauer, seven points.' "

After that performance in Evanston, the four would never be out of Nebraska's starting line-up. They were terrific. Though inexperienced, they went on to win seven of the eight remaining games, and the first of three consecutive Big Six championships. The lone loss was, of course, to Pittsburgh, but the margin of 40-0 exceeded even the most pessimistic observer's fears. But hopes were very high, nonetheless, when the 1932 season opened; all but All-American lineman Hugh Rhea would be back.

Sauer and Company finished that season with a rather creditable 7-1-1 record. They rolled undefeated through their five conference rivals, and disposed of Kansas State and Southern Methodist as well.

But Bible, who liked to have a stabilized schedule, with the same non-conference opponents year after year, still had to contend with Pittsburgh and Minnesota. In 1932, he handled the Panthers as well as he ever could in his eight years at the Nebraska helm, and the game was a scoreless standoff. After fourteen seasons without playing one another, Minnesota and Nebraska revived their rivalry in 1932. And the Gophers, who would prove to be as great a nemesis for D. X.'s Cornhusker teams as Pittsburgh, winning all four contests, topped the Huskers 7-6. So there was another conference title, but somehow the season was considered a disappointment. But everyone was looking forward to the next year. All-American center Lawrence Ely was the only significant graduation loss. Minnesota would be off the schedule for a year, and the four boys from Lincoln High would be fully matured. They would be seniors and they would be unstoppable.

For the first seven games of that 1933 season, it all went according to plan. With touchdowns from Sauer, Masterson, Johnny Williams, and Jerry Lanoue, the Huskers topped Texas



Hugh Rhea, All-American tackle, 1930



Lawrence Ely, All-American center, 1932

26-0. There were two more shutouts, 20-0 over Iowa State and 9-0 over Kansas State, before Oklahoma was able to get a touchdown in a 16-7 loss.

The team was beginning to capture the imagination of the fans. And the following Saturday, 31,000 of them showed up at Memorial Stadium to watch Kansas absorb a 12-0 beating. The next opponent was Iowa, that fugitive from the old Missouri Valley Conference.

The game was played on a miserable day in Memorial Stadium. It was gray, and there was a gusting 30-mile-an-hour wind that cut through your clothing like a razor blade. The Cornhuskers managed to eke out a 7-6 win on a fluke touchdown that was supposed to have been a field goal attempt with the ball on the Iowa five and Jack Miller holding for kicker Masterson.

"It was so windy," Miller recalled years later, "that one Iowa punt which would have been a good kick in normal weather was caught up in the gale and carried backward so that it actually bounced down behind the kicker. When the ball was centered on that field goal play, the pass was against the wind. The ball arched away from me. I reached as far as I could but I was barely able to touch it with my fingertips. Bernie had recognized that problem instantly. Before anybody could do anything he had picked up that ball and was on his way to a touchdown. He was so fast that everybody thought the play was planned as a fake. We didn't say much about it then. But it wasn't."

There were just two teams now standing between the Cornhuskers and the first perfect season since Jumbo Stiehm's boys did it in 1915. One of the teams was Oregon State, and it became a 22-0 victim.

The other team was Pittsburgh. Some things just aren't meant to be.

The Huskers made the long train ride to Pittsburgh filled with optimism. But the train ride back to Lincoln was even longer. They had been beaten 6-0, and they couldn't quite

explain how and why.

It was the end of the line for the four boys from Lincoln High, and as they had grown to men they had accomplished one rather remarkable thing. In six years of varsity football in Lincoln, Nebraska—three in high school and three at the university—they had never lost a game on their home field.

Despite that 6-0 loss to Pitt, the Cornhuskers of that year were ranked the Number Two team in the nation, behind only Michigan, by the Dickinson Rating System. And they collected personal honors by the bushelful.

Eight players off of that squad were selections to the all-Big Six team. They were: Sauer, Masterson, and Kilbourne, three of the Lincoln Four, as well as end Lee Penney, tackle Gail O'Brien, guard Warren DeBus, center Franklin Meier, and back Hubert Boswell.

And there were even more honors for fullback Sauer, who was considered by many experts to be the finest college football player in the country in 1933. He was on every All-American team, and he led the voting for the College All-Star game, which would be played in Chicago that summer. He also was the star of the West's 12-0 victory over the East in the Shrine All-Star game that was played in San Francisco in December.

After graduation, Sauer went on to play three years with the Green Bay Packers. He retired from playing in 1937, and went into the teaching and administrative end of the game. He coached at Kansas and Baylor and was a general manager and player personnel director in the National Football League with the Boston Patriots and the New York Jets.

With Sauer and Masterson gone, the doomsayers started predicting woeful times for Bible. D. X. was a man who found unadulterated, simple power football repugnant. He was Bearg's opposite in this respect. He liked genteel football, innovative intelligent football, football where you lived and died by your wits.

Realizing this, many experts claimed that D. X. hadn't cultivated any replacements for the great successful seniors,



George Sauer, All-American fullback, 1933

who had run up a three-year record of 23-4-1. His teams had always been thin, they wrote, and he hadn't schooled successors. It would be trouble, they said.

Really, though, it was no trouble, no trouble at all. The doomsayers simply hadn't heard of the two young men on the 1933 freshmen team named Lloyd Cardwell and Sam Francis. By the time they were done in Lincoln, people would be hard pressed to describe exactly how it was that George Sauer was so great.

Francis, a native of Kansas, and Cardwell, from Seward, Nebraska, were attracted to the university in Lincoln by Indian Schulte. At the time, Schulte was serving both as Bible's line coach and as the head track coach, and he struck a deal with both athletes. They could participate in football as well as track and field. And there was one truly amazing aspect to Schulte's recruiting coup—neither athlete got a scholarship. Nebraska didn't give athletic scholarships in those days. The athletes had to pay all their own fees out of the money they earned from the jobs that the university got for them in Lincoln. Cardwell, for instance, had a job at the *Lincoln Star* that required him to be there six nights a week for four hours a night.

"When we'd play Pittsburgh," Cardwell remembered after graduating, "their guys wouldn't believe we weren't getting our tuition. So we said that we were. We didn't want to seem dumb playing for nothing."

But play for nothing, they did. And they played as well or better than anybody before them in the entire history of Nebraska football.

In their first season, 1934, the one that had the doomsayers drooling, Cardwell and Francis did quite well. They finished 6-3, suffering the inevitable losses, 20-0 to Minnesota and 25-6 to Pittsburgh, and one unexpected defeat in the final game that stung, 19-7 to Kansas State.

The next season was almost identical. It was 6-2-1, with the defeats inflicted by the Gophers and the Panthers, and this

time a scoreless tie with Kansas State. That season also included a stunning, unexpected triumph over the University of Chicago team coached by Clark Shaughnessy. The Maroons were favored in that season-opening game, as they were led by Jay Berwanger, who would win the first Heisman Trophy later that fall, emblematic of his selection as the nation's outstanding player.

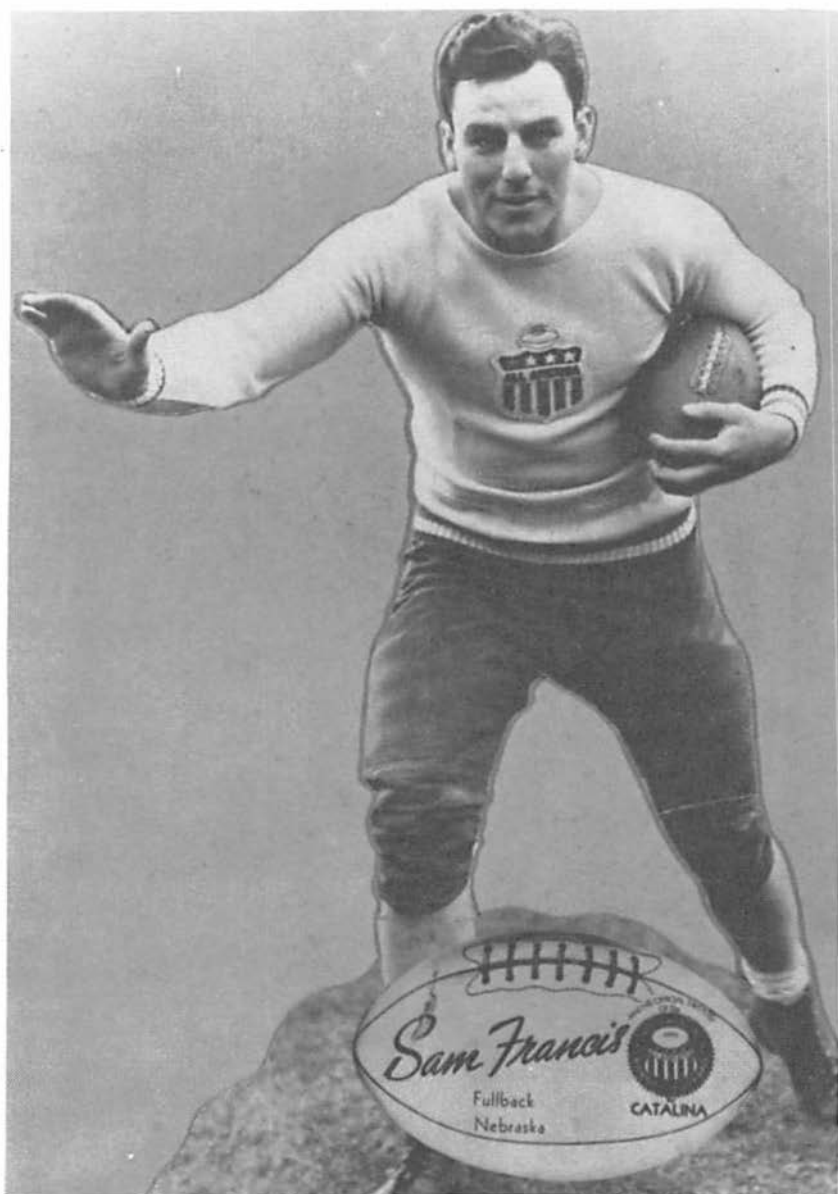
On the first series of the game, Berwanger showed his stuff, which was considerable. Winding up with the ball on almost every play, he drove the Maroons to a touchdown and a 7-0 advantage.

It was a short-lived lead. The ensuing kickoff came down to Cardwell on the Nebraska 13-yard line. The Wild Hoss of Seward, a 6-3, 190-pound sprinter, headed for the left sideline and turned on the speed. He didn't stop until he had crossed the goal line 87 yards away. He scored two more touchdowns that day as the Huskers scored an impressive 28-7 win.

That summer was a big one for Francis and Cardwell as track stars. It was an Olympic year, 1936, the year of Adolf Hitler's infamous Nazi Olympics in Berlin. Both men went to the Olympic trials, Cardwell as a sprinter, hurdler, and long jumper, the burly Francis as a shotputter. Cardwell did well, but not well enough; but Francis made the Olympic team and spent the summer touring Europe. He didn't win a medal, but he came back that fall calmed down and ready for a brilliant season.

Personally, he had that kind of season, but the team's performance, though it captured the conference title for the second consecutive season, was disappointing again. The team finished that campaign 7-2 with the losses once again inflicted by Minnesota and Pittsburgh. It really wasn't too bad, though, because the Gophers and Panthers were ranked one and three, respectively. But the loss to Minnesota was exceedingly difficult for the ninth-ranked Huskers to swallow.

For 59 minutes and one second of the contest, neither team had been able to score. Neither, really, had even been



Sam Francis, All-American fullback, 1936

able to advance the ball much. And with just 59 seconds showing on the scoreboard clock, the Huskers stalled again. It was fourth down and they had to punt. Francis, who usually did the kicking, had left the game several minutes earlier with a head injury. So Ron Douglas, another back, punted. The kick soared high and long, down to the 33-yard line where, almost out of bounds, the Gophers' Bud Wilkinson, who would mature to haunt the Huskers in another way and from another school, kept the ball from reaching the sideline as Bible had hoped it would.

Wilkinson took two steps forward and attracted a covey of Husker defenders. Then, without warning, he lateraled back to Andy Uram, the speedy halfback, who was waiting for the ball in the clear on the 30, near the opposite sideline. Uram was able to outrun the Nebraska defenders easily for the touchdown that won the game 7-0.

Despite such overwhelming disappointment in only the second game of the season, the Huskers bounced back to play admirably. Especially Francis. A triple threat who passed lefty, kicked lefty, and ran with the determination and abandon of a wounded rhinoceros, Francis made almost every All-American team. Many experts and opposing players called him the nation's finest football player. And he was almost able to overcome the eastern bias in the Heisman Trophy balloting. He finished a narrow second behind Yale end Larry Kelley.

But even though Francis was clearly the better football player, Cardwell was the beloved one in Nebraska. Though the Golden Age of heroes had long since passed, for the state of Nebraska he was a hero out of that age. In May of 1937, as he was about to graduate, an open letter was written to Cardwell in the Omaha *World-Herald* by sports editor Frederick Ware:

Dear Cardie:

The home campus has seen the last of you as a Cornhusker, and as far as most Nebraskans are concerned that means you are through. . . .

It'd be easy, Old Hoss, to work myself into a

maudlin mood. All I'd have to do is reflect on your deeds the past three seasons, and then remind myself that I'll never see you in Nebraska's scarlet again.

Your days of helping cinch conference track championships for the Old Man by winning events which you seldom practiced, are over.

You're through playing the outfield for the football team when the other side has the ball. I wonder if I'll ever see another player streak from one sideline to the other and knock down an enemy pass? I saw you do that more than once. . . .

I could recall a great many other brilliant and unusual and unorthodox didoes, Cardie, for you perpetuated them almost every time you moved. You did the things that alumni and other severed followers will call up from memory and relive fondly, and a little wistfully, for years to come.

You are the greatest competitor I ever saw. You are more than that. You are one of the finest team men. . . .

And so, with those adoring phrases, the era of Cardwell and Francis passed. Francis would go on to the pros and the army, and Cardwell would also go on to the National Football League, playing seven seasons for the Detroit Lions. And when his career was done, Cardie would come back to Nebraska. There he would become the very successful track and football coach at the University of Omaha.

Another era passed that spring in Lincoln, too. The era of Dana Xenophon Bible. For after that 1936 season, Bible was given an opportunity to realize a dream. The University of Texas came calling. It came calling with a ten-year contract at \$15,000 dollars a year for Bible to be head football coach and athletic director. He was making \$11,000 a year at Nebraska, and he would have received a raise, but the Texas offer was one that couldn't be refused. Bible took it. For ten years, until 1946, he was the coach, and for another ten after that, before

retiring, he was the athletic director. He did quite well for himself, and even in leaving he did well for the University of Nebraska. For when he left, the shaken Nebraskans asked him to choose a replacement. He recommended Lawrence McCeney (Biff) Jones. And in time, the volatile Lawrence McCeney Jones would bring the whole state one of its greatest football thrills. A thrill greater than any even D. X. Bible could orchestrate.



Fred Shirey, All-American tackle, 1937

7

Tough Guys Don't Always Finish First

Biff Jones was an army man. He was the quintessential army man. Through and through. Tough, stoic, demanding.

When Biff Jones came out of Washington, D.C. as a thick-necked teenager, he went to West Point. While he was there, he played left tackle on the football teams of 1915 and 1916. He was one of the stars of that 1916 team that went through its season undefeated and won the mythical national championship. After the season, he was elected the captain for the next year's squad. But by the time the 1917 season rolled around, Jones had already graduated. He was in France serving in World War I as a lieutenant of field artillery with the American Expeditionary Force.

When the war ended, Biff returned to West Point. There, he served his time as a young officer as an assistant coach under Charlie Daly and John McEwan. He was a good assistant, and he made his mark, and in 1926, Captain Jones got his first head coaching assignment. He was to be the boss at West Point.

Jones coached at the Point for four very successful seasons. They happened to be the four seasons that "Onward Christian" Cagle, who was one of the all-time greats, was the Cadets' leading running back. Jones' four year record was 30-8-2; in 1926 the Cadets were 7-1-1; in 1927, 9-1; in 1928, 8-2; and in 1929, 6-4-1. Among the victories was the 13-3 Michie Stadium conquest of Nebraska that kept the Huskers out of the Rose Bowl. Little did Biff know, on that gloomy West Point, New York afternoon in 1928, that he was setting himself up for one of the great moments of his life, thirteen years hence.

In 1930 and 1931, Captain Jones got a change of orders. It was a promotion, sort of, but one that took him away from the gridiron. For two years he was field artillery officer and assistant graduate manager of athletics at the Point.

In 1932, Jones was given the opportunity to return to coaching. Early that year, James Broussard, the athletic director at Louisiana State, offered Biff the university's coaching job. Biff hesitated when Broussard first approached. The LSU job was a notoriously ticklish one because flamboyant Senator Huey Long took a proprietary interest in LSU football. It was a job that seemed to require a polished, patient, politic man. And Biff Jones was anything but polished, patient, and politic. He was as fiery and demanding, if not as flamboyant and inconsiderate, as the egomaniacal senator.

Finally, though, Biff relented at Broussard's urging. He said he would take the job under one condition: that he also be an instructor in military science at the university so he didn't have to resign his commission in the army. Broussard and other university officials agreed. But still higher authority had to give the nod. Finally General Douglas MacArthur, then the Chief of Staff, consented to meet with Jones and Broussard. He listened to their proposition and asked but one question. How much would Jones be paid? When he was told \$7,500 per year, he immediately approved the deal. Seventy-five hundred dollars was a lot of money in those days.

While he was at Louisiana State, Jones adopted a rather

unique style of coaching games. He rarely stood or walked the sideline as most coaches do. Instead, he sat on an elevated chair that was positioned near the fifty yard line. From there, he would manipulate LSU's players very much like a director on a Hollywood movie set.

And he manipulated them quite well. In his three seasons at Baton Rouge, he ran up a record of 20-5-6, with season marks of 6-3-1, 7-0-3, and 7-2-2.

But it was inevitable that the stern, regal Jones and the manic Long would lock horns. That finally occurred during the last game of the 1934 season.

In the previous two games, the Tigers had suffered losses to Tennessee and Tulane that very much upset Kingfish Long. In this last game, they were behind Oregon 13-0 at halftime. Just as the team had settled down in the locker room, and Jones was about to start his chalk talk, Long burst through the locker room door.

"Can I talk to the team?" he asked Jones, demandinglly.

This upset Jones, who was planning on a strategy session rather than an emotional pep talk. He became curt.

"No," Jones said.

"Who's gonna stop me?" Kingfish demanded.

"You're not going to talk."

"Well, I'm sick and tired of losing and tying games. You better win this one."

"Well, Senator, get this: Win, lose or draw, I quit."

"That's a bargain," Long concluded.

Well, LSU rallied and won 14-13. But Biff Jones was a man of his word. He wouldn't back down. He quit. But he didn't have any trouble finding a job.

Biff Jones left the Southeastern Conference and moved a bit north and to the west—to Oklahoma and the Big Six. In 1935, while D. X. Bible was leading Nebraska to the Big Six championship, Jones was doing the job of reorganizing and revitalizing the sagging football fortunes of the Sooners. In 1934, Oklahoma had finished third in the conference with a

2-2-1 record, but overall it could do no better than 3-4-2. In 1935, Jones improved Oklahoma's record to a second place 3-2 in the Big Six and 6-3 over-all. Among Oklahoma's losses that year was a 19-0 thumping administered by the Cornhuskers.

The next season, as Biff was getting his own recruits into the action, the Sooners slipped a bit. They finished fourth in the league at 1-2-2 and had a 3-3-3 season. But Biff had laid the foundation for Tom Stidhma, who ran up a 15-3-2 record the next two seasons in Norman.

Biff Jones wasn't able to capitalize on this groundwork himself, because he was busy elsewhere trying to figure out how to beat the Sooners. That elsewhere, of course, was Lincoln, Nebraska.

When Jones was hired by the athletic department in 1937, there weren't a lot of secret sessions in out-of-the-way places as there were before Bible was offered the job. Bible's recommendation was good enough for the people on the athletic board. Biff accepted the job readily, even though it meant he would have to resign his commission as a major in the army because the University of Nebraska had no military science courses for him to teach.

In his first game, inheriting a fairly decent squad from Bible, Jones did something that Dana Xenophon couldn't do in all his eight years of trying. He led the Huskers to a 14-9 victory over Minnesota.

It was oppressively hot on that September Saturday, but 37,000 fans packed Memorial Stadium in Lincoln to see the new coach anyway. He gave them more than they could ever have hoped for, although in the beginning it seemed as if nothing had changed at all.

Bernie Bierman's Golden Gophers, led by Andy Uram, Vic Spadiccini, and Larry Buhler, received the opening kick-off and promptly marched 63 yards to take a 6-0 lead. The Huskers came back to take the lead before the half, though. After recovering a Minnesota fumble on the Gophers' 24-yard line, Johnny Howell slammed over from the four. The extra

point gave Nebraska a 7-6 halftime lead. The third period was a scoreless battle, with the visitors dominating the action, before they finally got on the scoreboard again in the fourth quarter to take a 9-7 lead on a field goal by Horace Bell.

But several minutes later, Minnesota mishandled a Nebraska punt again, and this time the charmed Huskers recovered on the opposition's 40-yard line. Three pass plays later, the Huskers had a 14-9 lead that would be preserved for posterity. It was just the third time in the twentieth century and the first time since 1913 that Nebraska had beaten Minnesota in a football game.

That game, though the first, was a thrilling highlight to a pretty good season. The Huskers finished 6-1-2, losing to Pittsburgh and tying Oklahoma and Kansas.

That first season under Jones produced some standout individuals as well as a fine record and a conference championship. Jones hadn't changed things much from the way Bible had run them. The team still used the Pop Warner double- and single-wing formations. Formations that depended, as Bible insisted they would, on a combination of deception and power, innate ability and intellect.

Writers from around the Big Six anointed six of those 1937 starters first team all-conference. They were: end Elmer Dohrmann, who won more letters than any athlete in Nebraska history, tackles Fred Shirey and Ted Doyle, guard Bob Mehring, quarterback Johnny Howell, and center Charley Brock, who was also first team All-American.

But those great players were seniors and they wouldn't be around the next year, and that meant just one thing—trouble. It came, too.

1938 was a rebuilding year for University of Nebraska football. Jones wanted to change some things. In Bible's era, Nebraska had been mostly an eleven-man football team. Traditionally, Cornhusker teams had poor bench strength. Jones didn't like this. At West Point and Louisiana State, Jones had lots of talented players and deep teams; often he could substi-



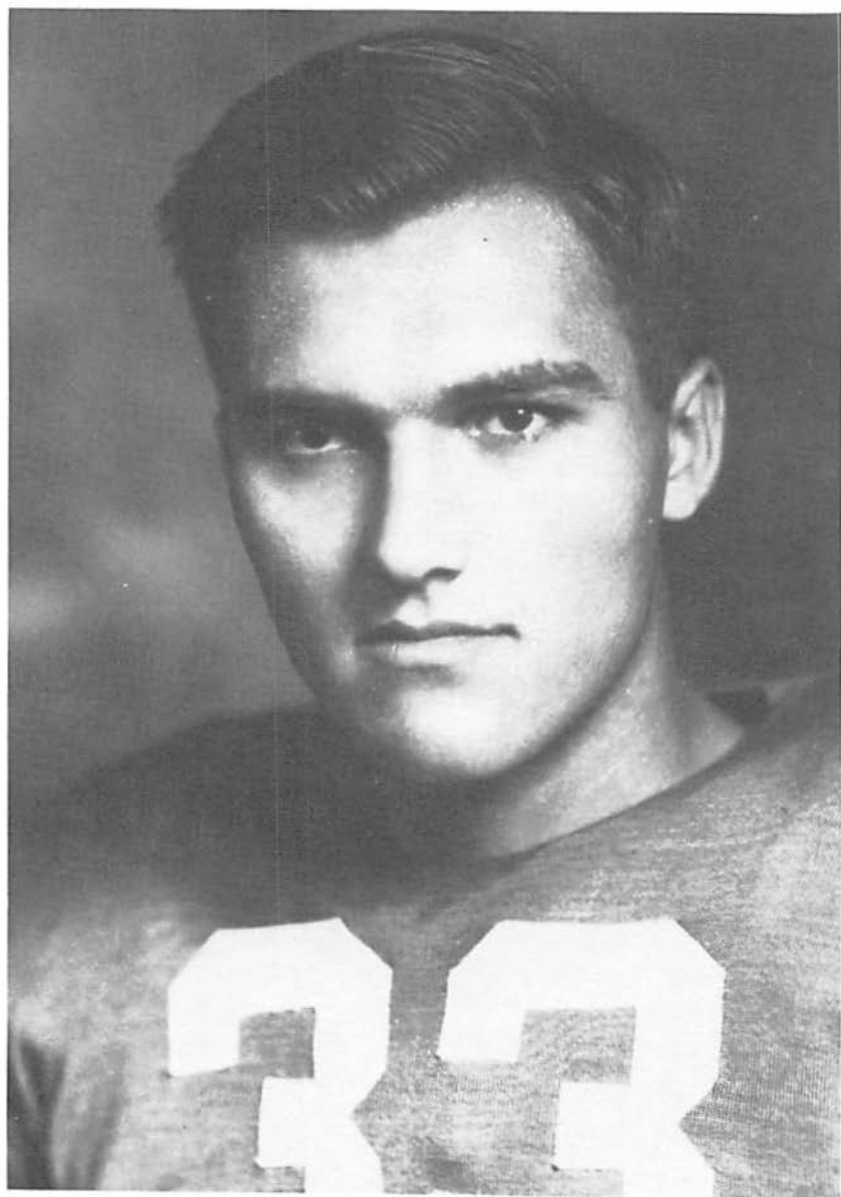
Charles Brock, All-American center, 1937

tute without affecting the ability of his team on the field. At Nebraska he found he didn't have that leeway. He almost always had to go with his best eleven men for sixty minutes. In 1938 he set about to alter that. He did so by playing a lot of sophomores, the people he had recruited when he took the job in the winter and spring of 1937. He paid dearly for throwing so much inexperience on the field at one time. The Cornhuskers had just a 3-5-1 record that year. But the next year they would begin reaping the rewards of patience.

The 1939 season started badly—with a 7-7 deadlock with Indiana. But the next game, the Cornhuskers came back to beat Minnesota for the second time in three years, 6-0. Then there were victories over Iowa State, Baylor, and Kansas State. Later Kansas, Pittsburgh, and Oklahoma would fall.

But there would be no Big Six championship for Nebraska that year. Missouri saw to that in the sixth game of the season. Led by Paul Christman, the All-American back, the Tigers beat the Cornhuskers 27-13. Missouri finished unbeaten in the league and 8-2 for the season, while the Huskers were 7-1-1.

But amends would be made the next season. And how, they would be made.



Forrest Behm, All-American tackle, 1940



The First Bowl

Herman Rohrig was a typical member of the 1940 University of Nebraska football team.

Like 38 of the squad's 39 members—and this is a truly remarkable statistic—he was a native of Nebraska.

Like 39 of the 39 members of the squad, he did not receive any financial aid from the university.

Herman Rohrig grew up in Lincoln. As a kid, he used to go down to Memorial Stadium on Saturdays and sneak into the games. Those Saturday afternoons started a love affair. Football became Herman Rohrig's passion. It was what he lived to do. And by the time he was a senior at Lincoln High School, Rohrig was quite good at it. He made every important all-state team.

The next year, logically, Rohrig wanted very badly to attend the University of Nebraska. But no one from the school had even tried to recruit him. Other schools showed interest. Schools like Colorado State and Alabama.

In the winter of his senior year in high school, Alabama

invited Rohrig down to Tuscaloosa for a visit. They showed him a grand time and offered him a scholarship.

"Another kid from Lincoln High School — Bill Pfieff — and I went down there together," Rohrig remembered one afternoon years later. "We had a terrific time. We decided that we were going to school together, and we decided to go to Alabama. We never considered Nebraska. Neither of us could afford to pay for college and we couldn't afford not to take the Alabama scholarship. My father was a janitor at the *Lincoln Star*. How much money could he have been making?"

And then one day in that spring of 1937, Herman Rohrig got a telephone call at home. On the other end of the line was Cy Sherman, the legendary sports editor of the *Lincoln Star*, the man who had given the University of Nebraska their nickname, Cornhuskers. Cy Sherman told Rohrig that he would like to meet with him the next afternoon at the newspaper office.

On the day of the meeting, Cy Sherman had a very serious, stern expression on his face.

"I understand," Sherman said to him, "that you are thinking of going away from home to school."

"Yes, Sir," Rohrig replied. "My dad can't afford to pay for me to go, and Alabama offered me a scholarship that I'm taking."

All the while Cy Sherman was looking Rohrig straight in the eye, making him feel very uncomfortable.

"You stay here in the state and go to school," Sherman said. "And if you don't, I'll see to it that your father is fired."

End of conversation. Herman Rohrig, 17 years old, walked out of the *Star* building shaken. He didn't know who to turn to, or what to do. But he was sure of one thing — he could not let himself be the reason for his father's firing.

So the next fall, Herman Rohrig never showed up in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He just walked across town and registered at the University of Nebraska as Cy Sherman told him to.

"I didn't have a scholarship, either," Rohrig recalled. "None of us did. Most of the players came from Lincoln High

or right around Lincoln and were in situations similar to mine. I lived at home and I worked a job. They had certain jobs arranged with the people around Lincoln, especially for the football players. But they weren't like a lot of the jobs athletes get now. We actually had to work. My job was in the Power Company. From seven until eleven every night, right after practice and dinner, I had to sweep up and clean the rooms.

"Later in the service, I became friendly with a bunch of guys who had played ball in the Southeastern Conference at places like Alabama. I told them I almost went to Alabama, but wound up staying home and going to Nebraska for nothing. They didn't believe that. They told me I was kidding them. So finally I just said that we got \$250 a month on top of room, board, and tuition. But, really, we didn't get a thing."

That was the way life was for Biff Jones' greatest collection of football players, the players he nursed along as freshmen, suffered with as sophomores, triumphed with as juniors and celebrated with as seniors.

They were talented and they were numerous, for they were the group of young men who composed two full elevens, the elevens Jones liked so much to alternate in his meticulously constructed two-platoon system. Players like halfback Rohrig, and his alternate Harry (Hippity) Hopp. Ray Prodhaska and Allen Zikmund, Wayne Blue, and Vike Francis (Sam's younger brother, whose family had moved to McCook). Forrest Behm, the All-American tackle, quarterback Roy Petsch, Butch Luther, Dale Bradley, and Fred Meier.

They came up together and they grew up together.

"We were a close-knit team," Rohrig said. "And I think what did it was that we went through bad times together. Yeah, what really made us was that as the '38 team, we were one of the first real losing teams in Nebraska history, but we never lost our poise and spirit. I mean, during and after that year the people all of a sudden thought that, my God, what's going on? Nebraska football is going to pot.

"It wasn't, of course. We were just young and we were learning. The next year we came back, and we only lost to

Missouri. We were a real good team, then, but when we stayed together that third year, there was no way we weren't going to be super.

"The thing about us, I think, was that by that last year we had two equally talented teams. We usually were able to wear the other guys down. We had a lot of strength, and in those days when you were only passing 10 or 12 times a game, strength and running were the most important things. And because our guys were always fresh, the strength was that much more devastating.

"Also, except for Vike Francis, who was quite a character and didn't train or anything—he just did it on natural ability—we didn't get too far out of line. That was the thing about Jones. He was a hell of a disciplinarian. I think most of his success is due to that. But sometimes it got to be almost too much. He would discipline the hell out of us, and the assistants, (Link) Lyman, (Glenn) Presnell and (W. H.) Browne, they had the knack for patting a kid on the fanny after he was told off and getting him back up."

Yes, it was a great and powerful and deep Nebraska team in 1940. And then in the first game of the season it went out and acted like a lot of other Nebraska teams, ones that weren't so great or powerful or deep.

It lost to Minnesota.

The final score was 13-7, and the Gophers won it in the last quarter with a pass play for a touchdown, after a 66-yard reverse by Luther that worked for an apparent six-pointer was called back because one of the Cornhuskers had been caught offsides.

The next Saturday, though, against Indiana in Memorial Stadium, that original Big Red Machine got into gear and kept on rolling and didn't stop until after a new year had been tolled in.

The Hoosiers fell by a score of 13-7. Then Kansas was the victim, this time by a 53-2 mark. Then came the revenge game, the game against Paul Christman and Missouri. Before a crowd of 38,000 in Memorial Stadium, the Huskers won

20-7, and achieved a little bit of vengeful gratification by rendering the magnificent Christman useless. He completed just 10 of 30 passes the whole day for 78 yards, and he was able to get only 20 of those yards before the final quarter, when the ball game was already out of reach.

In the next three weeks, the victories continued to mount, and the nation began to take note. First Oklahoma fell 13-0, then Iowa 14-6, and finally that eastern nemesis Pittsburgh, by a 9-7 score.

That left the Huskers 6-1, with Iowa State coming into Lincoln for a very big game. With them, though, the Cyclones brought horrible weather—the turf became icy and slippery as a bitter wind ripped over the plains out of the north. It was upset weather, the kind of weather that unmercifully neutralizes greatness, the kind of weather that seems to reward mediocrity. And for a half, the 18,000 fans who sat bravely in Memorial Stadium thought that's exactly what they were witnessing. An upset of the great Cornhuskers by an Iowa State team that would finish the season no better than 4-5.

"I remember that game very well," Herman Rohrig said. "It was a big game, and there were a lot of reporters from all around the country there. But we played terrible in the first half, and Iowa State was winning 12-0. Jones was really ticked. He came in there and he screamed at us. And finally he said, 'Are you gonna let that bunch of plough jockeys run you down?' It was really strange. Here we were a bunch of farmers from Nebraska, plough jockeys, too, but we got madder than hell and we went out there and scored three touchdowns and they didn't do a thing."

They didn't, and Nebraska had another win, this time by a 21-12 score. By then, as Nebraska had a 7-1 record, it was obvious to everyone that if it beat Kansas State in the season finale it would probably go to a bowl game.

So that next Saturday, there was simply no way that Kansas State was going to interfere with the Cornhuskers' New Year's date with destiny. Rohrig scored first, and then Luther, who gained 161 yards on 19 carries, scored twice more, and the



Warren Alfson, All-American guard, 1940

Cornhuskers won 20-0. Now, all they needed was patience and a little bit of faith.

"We had heard of the possibility that we would go to the bowl," Rohrig said. "And we felt we had a good chance, because Minnesota was number one and they only beat us 13-7 when we had a touchdown called back, and they couldn't go to the Rose Bowl for some reason. And then we heard that Paul Zimmerman, the writer from the *Los Angeles Times* who came from Nebraska, was really working for us with the Rose Bowl Committee. He intimated to Jones that he would do everything in his power to convince them that we were the most representative team.

"There was a delay of a week, I think, but then on a Sunday night, pretty late, the word finally came through. I remember I was sitting in a bull session in one of the dorms and someone came bursting through the door and said 'Dija hear the news?'"

The word had come at 10:45 that night, but guys went bursting through doors all over campus asking that same question. There was no doubt that it was the biggest thing that had ever happened on the quiet campus of the University of Nebraska. The Cornhuskers were going to play in the Rose Bowl against Stanford! Though sorority curfew had already passed, and the women were all locked up, men took out ladders and lowered the women through the windows. This was a night for parties, no matter what time it was. The next morning, it was

the lead story in all the papers, and classes were called off at the university, for few of the frazzled students would have attended anyway.

For many Nebraskans, the Rose Bowl presented a welcome problem. How to get there? It was really of little moment, though, and all 5,000 tickets allotted the school were sold within three days after they arrived from Pasadena.

For Biff Jones, the Rose Bowl presented a new problem—the T-formation. Nebraska had never faced the T. Jones had never in his life had to devise defense to stop the T with a man-in-motion. And few teams ran the T better than Clark Shaughnessy's Indians. They should have: he invented it.

At quarterback, Stanford had Frankie Albert, the greatest lefthander ever. He was perfect for the T. He was intelligent, a deft, deceptive ball handler, a brilliant passer and an adequate runner. Behind Albert were halfbacks Pete Kmetovic and Hugh Gallarneau and Norm Standlee at fullback. All four of them would go on to play pro football.

A few times in December, Jones tried to defy the snow and practice in Lincoln, but little was accomplished. It was quickly decided to go to Phoenix to practice on December 19. The team traveled by train and lavishly—in three Pullman cars, with a private diner and club car.

On the way to Phoenix, the train stopped at El Paso.

"We were a bunch of excited country boys, and we didn't know any better," Rohrig remembered. "So we got off at El Paso and went into Mexico. We had never seen the country. We were dumb enough, too, to drink the water. All of us were sick in Arizona, and we were weak as puppies for the game."

On December 31, the train carrying the Huskers pulled into Los Angeles. There was no doubt that the team was as ready as it would ever be. But it simply was not ready enough.

At first, though, it didn't seem that way. Vike Francis received the opening kickoff and returned it 28 yards to the Nebraska 47. From scrimmage Nebraska started to give the ball alternately to Francis and Butch Luther. They burst through the Stanford line easily for good yardage. Without

even attempting a pass, the Huskers moved the ball to the Indians' one-yard line. On first down, Vike Francis bulled over for the touchdown, and then he added the extra point to give Nebraska a 7-0 lead.

But on defense, the Huskers were virtually helpless. They simply couldn't cope with the T. With relative ease, the Indians marched through the confounded Huskers to their first score on the next possession. Gallarneau scored from the nine on a draw play, and Albert kicked the extra point.

In the second quarter, though, fate seemed to be with Nebraska for a while. Albert, who rarely committed errors, fumbled the ball on his own 33 and Zikmund, the fleet end, recovered. On the next play, Rohrig tossed a 33-yard touchdown pass to Zikmund. The extra point kick failed, and Nebraska held a 13-7 lead.

It was short-lived. For, five minutes later, Albert responded in kind. He threw a 40-yard touchdown pass to Gallarneau, who had been beaten by Zikmund on the Nebraska score. Albert's touchdown gave Stanford a 14-13 lead that it would never relinquish.

It didn't always seem that would be the case, though. In the third quarter, Stanford's T started to work again. It ground through the Nebraska defense as if the Nebraska defense wasn't there. It ground and it ground until finally it came down to a first and goal to go on the Nebraska two-yard line. At that point, though, it seemed as if the tide might actually turn. For, remarkably, Stanford, on four tries, could not budge the Nebraska defense.

When it took possession, though, neither could the Huskers budge the Stanford defense, and Hippity Hopp wound up punting from his own end zone. His kick was a good one: Kmetovic had to retreat to the 50-yard line to get it. Kmetovic's first steps were to his left, and he seemed hopelessly trapped. Three Nebraskans had him surrounded. But, inexplicably, not one of them tried to bring Kmetovic down. So he reversed his field, he peeled back to the right, giving ground, and as he did, he started to collect a wall of friendly white-clad

blockers. The blocks were devastating, good crack-backs that took out two and three Huskers at a shot. Kmetovic sprinted down the right sideline untouched and into the end zone. Albert kicked the extra point, and that was the last score of the day. Nebraska had seen its moment of glory, its moment in the sun, its one chance in the Rose Bowl, and though opportunity was rife, it just couldn't grasp on to it.

"Two things beat us in that game," Rohrig recalled. "One element was the T. We never were able to defense it. Lyman and Presnell wanted us to approach it one way, a way that might have worked, but Jones liked a different way, one that had no chance. Albert was great; we just couldn't cope with him.

"The other thing was that punt return. That one play. After we stopped them on that goal line stand, it seemed as if the momentum might be going our way. But then Kmetovic took that damn punt. Three guys were around him, but no one tried to tackle him. Then he got the one block he needed, and that was it."

That was it, OK.

That spring, Jones lost nearly all his players to graduation, and in the fall of 1941, he had to embark on a new rebuilding year. He didn't do badly considering the circumstances, but he didn't do well, either. The Huskers were one of those mediocre teams at 4-5.

But it was a rebuilding job Jones never got to finish. At the end of the 1941 season, World War II broke out, and Biff was called back to West Point, to be Major Jones again, the graduate manager of athletics at the United States Military Academy. He would never again return to Nebraska as a football coach.

And for the longest while it seemed like the greatness and joy he brought a whole state on the fiftieth anniversary of football at Nebraska was lost forever, too.

Though no one realized it at the time, of course, that Rose Bowl game would be the last great hurrah for two decades.



George Clark, Nebraska coach, 1945, 1948

9

The Futile Forties

World War II, it is generally conceded by historians and economists, was the force that brought an abrupt, decisive conclusion to the Great Depression that had struck during Herbert Hoover's presidency in 1929.

With Nebraska football, things worked in reverse. Instead of being a time of hopeless futility around the football offices in Lincoln, the Great Depression was a time of unremitting success and exuberance.

And instead of being a time of recuperation, recovery, health, and determination, World War II was a time of confusion and terrible depression around those same football offices.

When Biff Jones was called back to his old job at West Point, he was succeeded by one of his assistants, Glenn Presnell. Presnell had been a great player under Ernie Bearg in the 1920s, but as a coach he wasn't as blessed as Bearg was. He simply did not have a team full of Glenn Presnells playing for him. In fact, he didn't have a team full of much of anything except holes.

In ten games that 1942 season, Presnell's Huskers could manage to score just 55 points. And 53 of them came in the five conference games, of which Nebraska miraculously managed to win three, which was good enough for a third place Big Six finish. In non-conference games—five were played—there were no miracles. The Huskers couldn't even win one of them. In four they were shut out, and all told Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, and Iowa Navy outscored the Cornhuskers 106 to 2.

Someone in the Department of War must have been paying attention. For at season's end, the Army mercifully plucked Presnell off the campus to go fight fascism.

The next victim was another ex-Cornhusker of a better era, Adolph J. Lewandowski. During this time, many other schools, such as Purdue, Kansas, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Illinois, were the sites of military training centers and used the trainees, some of whom were stars like Alex Agase and Elroy Hirsch, on the teams to supplement the 4-F's and youngsters who were allowed to stay in school full-time. Nebraska's football coaches weren't so fortunate. There wasn't any military training school on campus.

The 1943 Nebraska football team was made up of such a rag-tag collection. There were fifteen fuzzy-cheeked boys too young to register for the draft. There were eleven other young men too infirm to qualify for the military, which was then in desperate need of bodies; and there were seven healthy guys nervously awaiting the moment they would get their greetings.

The only break Lewandowski got in his two years as the Cornhusker boss was that wartime restrictions limited the schedule to eight games, and would not allow for the travel necessary to play Pittsburgh.

Lewandowski's first season opened with a 54-0 loss to Minnesota. That was followed by a 54-13 defeat inflicted by Indiana and a 27-6 victory by Iowa State. The other three losses that season were to Missouri, Iowa, and Oklahoma, all three of them also by overwhelming scores. Somehow, though,

that season the Huskers had a good time against the state of Kansas, and they wound up with two victories, as Kansas fell 7-6, and Kansas State 13-7.

1944 turned out to be pretty much the same. The Huskers ran up another 2-6 season, beating Kansas State again, and, remarkably, upsetting Missouri.

But by then, the whole business of athletics at the University of Nebraska was getting altogether too upsetting for Lewandowski. Not only was he the head football coach, but he was also head basketball coach, department business manager, and acting athletic director. When the Big Six meeting was held in Lincoln that year, Lewandowski was the host and, in addition, he was the entire Nebraska delegation. The other five conference schools were represented by four men each. At the season's end, Lewandowski resigned his coaching posts, and stayed on in the department as ticket sales boss.

In the summer of 1945, someone was finally selected to be the next Nebraska football coach. This was the iconoclastic George (Potsy) Clark. A man who did things differently from anyone else, but a man who knew quite a bit about football. Potsy had been a fine college player at Illinois, and a successful coach in both the collegiate and professional ranks. He had coached Butler, Michigan State, Kansas, Illinois, and Minnesota; the Detroit Lions, Brooklyn Dodgers, and Portsmouth Spartans. He had coached well and successfully. Until he came to Lincoln.

Potsy's team actually went through two seasons in 1945. One season consisted of the first five games. The second season consisted of the last four games. The first season was an unmitigated disaster. The second season was an overwhelming triumph.

In that first season, the Cornhuskers were not only winless but they were never in a ball game. Oklahoma opened the season with a 20-0 victory. Minnesota followed by beating the Huskers 61-7. Then Indiana won 54-14, Iowa State won 27-7, and Missouri 19-0.

But something strange happened in the week after that Missouri game. Something no one can quite explain. There was an astonishing change of personality on the team. It would have made sense if the players had just gone through the motions in those last four games, for the disaster of the first five was irretrievable. But for some reason there was a re-awakening of determination; instead of falling apart, Nebraska actually began to play better. First they beat Kansas 27-13, then the sister school, Kansas State, fell 24-0. South Dakota was the next victim, and by the unlikely score of 53-0. Then came Iowa, and that was the shocker. The Hawkeyes were big favorites; it wasn't that they were a good team, for they were horrible, but so was Minnesota, and the Gophers, who had beaten Nebraska 61-7, were thumped by Iowa. Nonetheless, defying all logic, the Cornhuskers won 13-7.

Potsy Clark, though, had had enough. He had agreed to come down only as the interim coach, until the war ended, which it had early that fall.

And so, another new coach was needed.

One possibility was Biff Jones. After all, federal law required that he be offered his old job back once the war ended. And so, in January 1945, the athletic board sent Jones a telegram stating that the job would be waiting for him, and hired Clark on an interim basis. But sometime in the fall of that year, members of the athletic board began to have second thoughts. Jones, for all his ability on the banquet circuit, for all his ability as a football coach, hadn't left on good terms. His autocratic, demanding, militaristic way offended many influential Lincolmites. A second letter was drafted and sent off to Major Jones at West Point. The athletic board offered Biff a one-year contract to return as athletic director. In terse, clear words, Biff Jones wrote back and told them what to do with their job.

Athletic board members, though a bit affronted, were relieved. It would have been uncomfortable having Jones around even for that one year. They set about their business of

finding a new coach. A permanent coach. They decided an old hero, one who woke up the echoes of a better time, would do best.

So they hired Bernie Masterson, George Sauer's old teammate in D. X. Bible's first great Cornhusker backfield. Masterson got a five-year \$50,000 pact to be coach and athletic director.

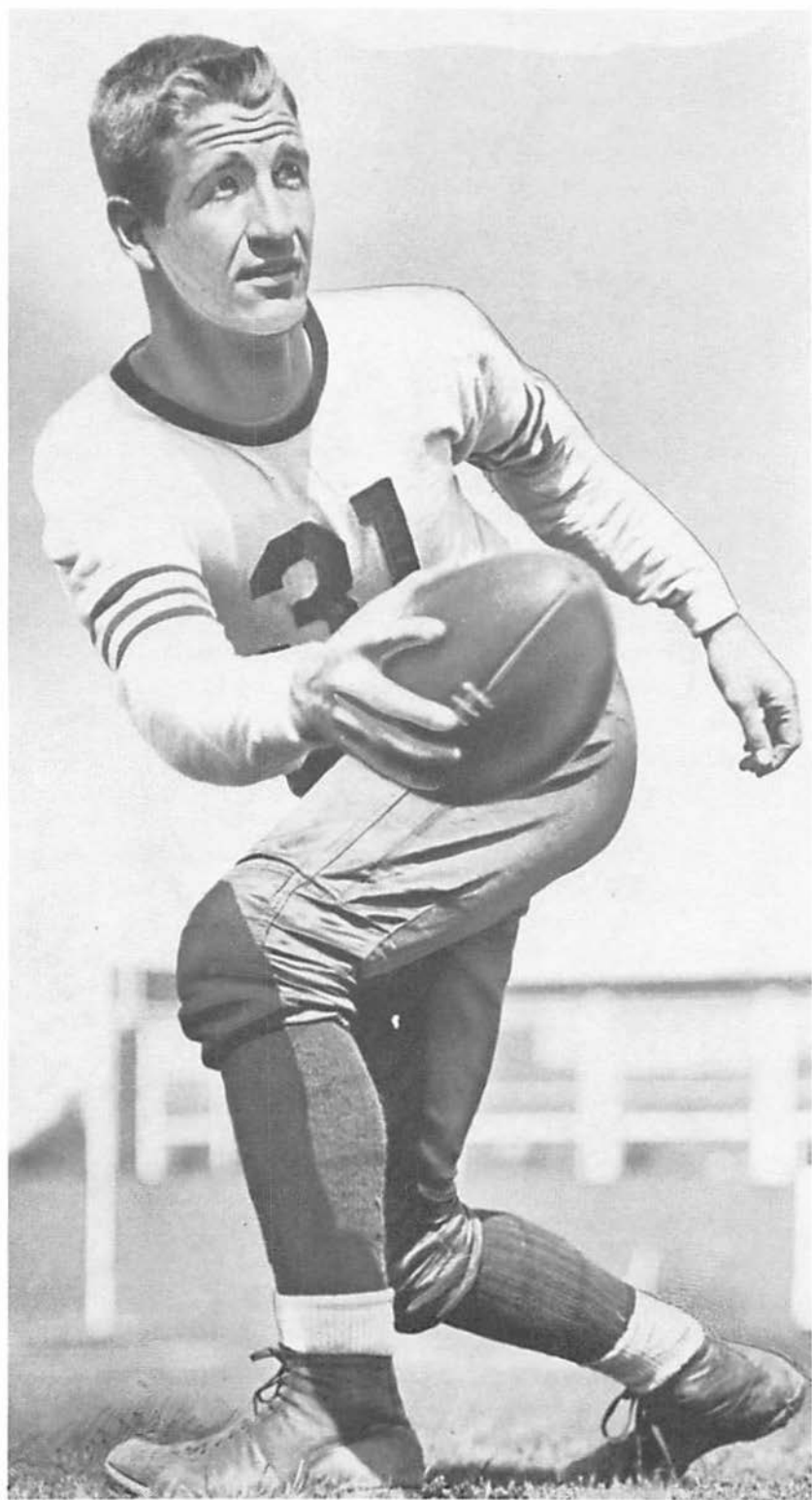
With him, Masterson brought the T-formation. After graduating in the spring of 1934, Masterson had joined the Chicago Bears as a quarterback. There, tutored by Clark Shaughnessy and George Halas, he became the National Football League's first T-quarterback. When he retired as a player, Masterson became an assistant college coach, and during the war, the Navy took him as a base football coach.

Bernie had a five-year contract, five years to make Nebraska the power it was when he was one of the stars. He had a five-year contract, but after two seasons it was clear that he wasn't the man who was going to restore the Cornhuskers to past glories, and after the 1947 season his contract was bought up.

In his first season, Masterson's T worked well enough against conference opponents Iowa State, Kansas State, and Kansas, which was then coached by his old running mate Sauer. The Cornhuskers finished tied for third in the league with a 3-2 record, having outscored their foes 106-62. But the new formation was of little use against Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, and UCLA, and the Huskers finished the season worse than the year before at 3-6.

Amazingly, the next season, 1947, the Huskers continued to decline. This time they were only able to defeat Iowa State and Kansas State and finished 2-7. In nine games, the T had only generated 73 points. The administration was disenchanted with the hero from another age; it gave him his walking papers, and turned toward a familiar figure.

Potsy Clark was brought back out of coaching retirement. But Potsy did little good. The 1948 Huskers won just two of



Bernie Masterson, Nebraska coach, 1946-1947



Bill Glassford, Nebraska coach, 1949-1955

eight games, and finished sixth in the league, which had become the Big Seven with Colorado's admission. The wins were, of course, over Iowa State and Kansas State, the old dependables.



Tom Novak, All-American center, 1949

Potsy kicked himself upstairs to a full-time job as athletic director after the season, and brought in a new coach from the University of New Hampshire. The man's name was Bill Glassford, and for a while it seemed like he might be just the man Nebraskans had been searching for.

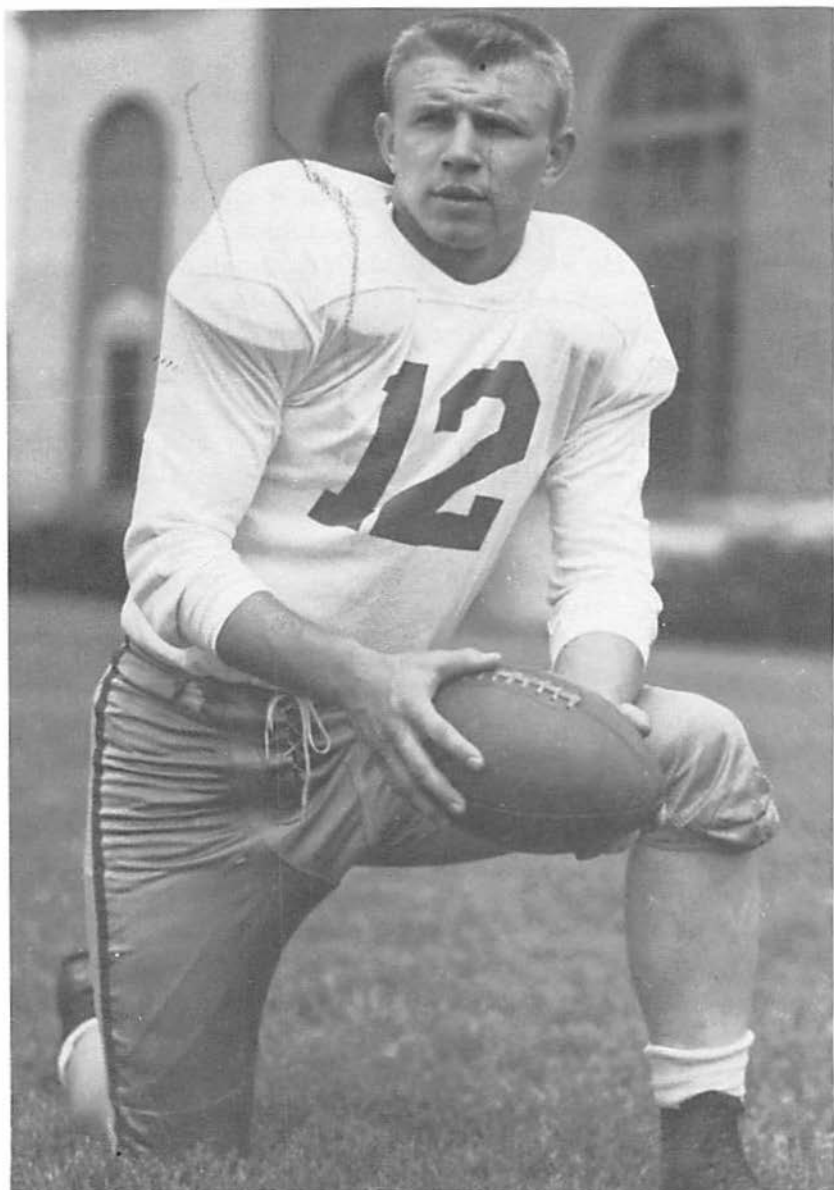
In 1949, Glassford gave Cornhusker fans their best team since the one that Biff Jones took to the Rose Bowl. Nebraska

won half its Big Seven games, and finished third in the conference. It beat Colorado, Kansas State, and Iowa State, and lost to Missouri by only a point. The Huskers also managed to win a non-conference game that year, beating South Dakota, and finished the season 4-5.

The star of that 1949 team was the man who turned out to be the only star football player Nebraska produced during the Futile Forties. He was a tough kid from Omaha who could have gone to Notre Dame and played for Frank Leahy, but he decided to stay at home after the war so his parents could see him play. His name was Tom Novak, and his friends and sportswriters called him Train Wreck. With reverence they called him Train Wreck. He was a linebacker and a center possessed of an unusual instinct for efficient, controlled, legal gridiron violence. Often, Tom Novak was vilified by opposing coaches and players. He was too rough, they all said.

And that was exactly the kind of talk that pleased Train Wreck the most. "I play for keeps," he once said. "I want to be noticed. Old Train Wreck is out there to make the fans see him. If I make an ordinary tackle, the fans will ask 'So what?' But when Train Wreck hits them, they know they've been hit."

Train Wreck was not lost in the anonymity that defeat so often brings. As he wished, he was noticed. Each of the four years he played, he was all-conference. And in his senior year, he was All-American. Tom Novak would be considered a superstar if he played today. But, clearly, he was a man too good for his time. Just as a 19-year-old sophomore running back was too good for his time when he broke into the starting line-up the autumn after Train Wreck graduated.



Bobby Reynolds, All-American halfback, 1950

10

One Tumultuous Decade B.D.

Bill Glassford coached football at the University of Nebraska for seven seasons. They were seven seasons in a goldfish bowl. And they were seven seasons in the eye of a hurricane. They were seasons of dispute, seasons of disappointment, seasons of joy, seasons of success, seasons of bitterness, and seasons of frustration. For good or for bad one thing was certain—if Bill Glassford was around, something noteworthy was going to happen sooner or later, and usually sooner.

One of the first disputes in which Glassford was involved in Lincoln was with his boss, Athletic Director Potsy Clark. Glassford was a disciple of Jock Sutherland at Pittsburgh. He played for him; he learned the game from him. One of the things Glassford learned was the importance of recruiting. Sutherland believed that Pittsburgh was successful because he was able to recruit the finest talent around. He was ahead of his time in that respect. He devoted much time and energy to attracting players. When Glassford arrived on the Nebraska campus in 1949, he explained to Clark the necessity and

importance of recruiting. All of this was new to Clark. Nebraska had never recruited very much, he told Glassford. It didn't have to, he said, the boys in the state just come to school here and we do well enough. Glassford countered that the boys in the state weren't enough, and that recent records made that plain. He told Clark that he intended to go out and recruit, especially in Pennsylvania.

Before he did, though, Glassford made one recruiting trip in the state. It was a trip to Grand Island High School to visit with a little halfback named Bobby Reynolds. It really was an unnecessary trip. "I had watched Nebraska games as a kid, had heard my dad talk about Nebraska football and I never had any intention of going anywhere else," Reynolds would say years later. But, though unnecessary, it was the finest recruiting trip sophisticated recruiter Bill Glassford ever made. He never coached a better, more important or more exciting player than the one he recruited first.

It all lasted just one year for Bobby Reynolds, but it was one remarkable year. A year even the brashest of Hollywood writers wouldn't have dared script for fear that it would be thrown back as too unbelievable. That 1950 season that Bobby Reynolds had was the kind that only Chip Hilton or Frank Merriwell could have played. It would all have been too improbable for even the most grandiose daydreamer. But it happened. It really happened to a 19-year-old sophomore with the All-American crew cut, a Pepsodent smile, and the 5-11, 170-pound frame of your average campus demigod.

It started in the first game of the season, against Indiana. The Huskers tied Indiana that day in Memorial Stadium 20-20. Sophomore Bobby Reynolds, of whom something was known but not too much expected, scored all of the 20 points. The first touchdown came modestly on a two-yard plunge through the line. The next two were on runs of 10 and 45 yards. Runs that didn't go according to the coach's plan; runs that gained a lot more than any coach could have even hoped. They were runs of the improvisational sort that Reynolds specialized in.

He started one way and cut back the other, then he floated untouched for interminable seconds waiting for his blocking to re-form. He followed that blocking until it removed every obstacle it could, until there was just one man left for him to beat, and after that it was simple. One man simply could not bring Bobby Reynolds down in the open field. You can't tackle a shadow. You can't tackle something that's not there. And somehow, some inexplicable how, Bobby Reynolds was never there when you dove to bring him down. All that was there was turf. Green, staining, embarrassing turf. It was frustrating, the kind of experience that caused defensive backs sleepless nights. But it was what Bobby Reynolds did best. Make you look foolish. He was an expert at giving the limp leg and taking it away just as the tackler dove for it. He had a doctorate in hesitating, starting one way, running the other, and winding up on his feet in the end zone while the field was littered with opposition-colored jerseys. He was a master of innovation, of taking the broken play and turning it into something successful.

That afternoon against Indiana, Nebraska fans started to find out some of those things. In the next eight games, Bobby Reynolds would make sure they never forgot them.

Minnesota was the second enemy of 1950. The game was to be played in Minneapolis. To Cornhusker fans that meant one thing. Certain defeat. It was inevitable to them. It was a rule, a truism of life. The University of Nebraska did not beat the University of Minnesota in a football game that was played in Minneapolis. It hadn't happened since 1902, and there was no reason to expect it would happen this time.

Doomsayers, you can be forgiven. For there was no way you could know. There was no way you really could have known that those three touchdowns and 187 yards Bobby Reynolds collected against Indiana were just a beginning. But they were.

Against Minnesota, up there in Minneapolis, Bobby carried the ball seventeen times. In those seventeen times, he

scored two touchdowns, one a five-yard sweep that came off as designed, and one on a 67-yard innovation. He finished the day with 161 yards gained. And Nebraska, a 15-point underdog, beat the points. By 21, Nebraska beat the points. For the Huskers walked off that field in Minneapolis, Minnesota with a 32-26 victory.

"I'm an old Nebraska fan," Bobby Reynolds would remember later. "I came to Memorial Stadium and saw the Rose Bowl team. . . . I had known the frustration of going against Minnesota. When we beat Minnesota in Minneapolis, I felt it was the end of an era." It was also right at the beginning of one, albeit a short-lived one.

The following Saturday, Nebraska was on the road again. In the Rocky Mountains to play Colorado in Boulder. Bobby Reynolds didn't let up. He gained 145 yards in fourteen carries. For the second time in three games, he scored all of the Cornhuskers' points—19. But it wasn't enough. Colorado scored 28.

The next week brought another non-conference foe into Memorial Stadium. By now, after those two sterling road performances, the fans in Lincoln were beginning to take note of Reynolds and his accomplishments. And now they wanted to see for themselves. They saw. The improbable sophomore from Grand Island carried twenty-four times for 186 yards. And again he scored all the Nebraska points as the Huskers shut out Penn State 19-0.

After Penn State, there was a parade of conference foes. First Kansas. The Huskers beat the Jayhawks 33-26. But after the game Bobby said he didn't play well. "My timing was off and I wasn't cutting well," he insisted. It was way off. He had only gained 156 yards on twenty-six attempts and scored a touchdown and three extra points. Bobby's timing returned the next week, just in time for the homecoming game against Missouri. In 25 rushes, he gained 175 yards and scored three touchdowns. The four extra points he added in the Huskers' 40-34 win gave him 22 for the game.

The next two opponents were Kansas State and Iowa State, the two teams that did so much to make those awful Saturdays in the 1940s a little more tolerable. Both of them joined the list of teams that had been vanquished by the Huskers that year. Both of them joined the list of teams that believed what they read about Bobby Reynolds. In fifteen carries he was good for 141 yards against the Wildcats, and in twenty-six tries he ran for 109 yards through the Cyclones.

Then it came down to the final week of the season in Norman, Oklahoma, against the Sooners. These were the Sooners of Bud Wilkinson. Indomitable Oklahoma, as in Oklahoma and the Seven Dwarfs. And Nebraska was one of the dwarfs.

And on that day, the show played true to form. The Sooners were indomitable, OK. Without even expending themselves too greatly, they were ahead 41-21 in the third quarter, and they wound up winning 49-35. The win gave them a perfect regular season record. They would go on to play Kentucky in the Sugar Bowl and lose. The loss ended Nebraska's season. It was a 6-2-1 season, which was a lot better than anyone expected. The loss also ended the incredible year of Bobby Reynolds. Against the Sooners he had gained 82 yards in twenty-four carries. He finished the season with twenty two touchdowns and 157 points. He also finished the season with 1,342 yards in 193 carries. That total was easily a Big Seven record. It was a remarkable total. No one before had ever even gained 1,000 yards in the Big Seven and its predecessors, and no one would gain as many as Reynolds did again until long after the Big Seven had become the Big Eight. Until, in 1968, a fullback from Oklahoma named Steve Owens would gain 1,536 yards.

At season's end Reynolds was given all the expected honors. He made the All-American teams. He won some player of the year awards. And he left a lot of people gasping. "What could he possibly do for an encore?" they wanted to know. "Christ, he's only a sophomore. What's he going to do the next

two years?"

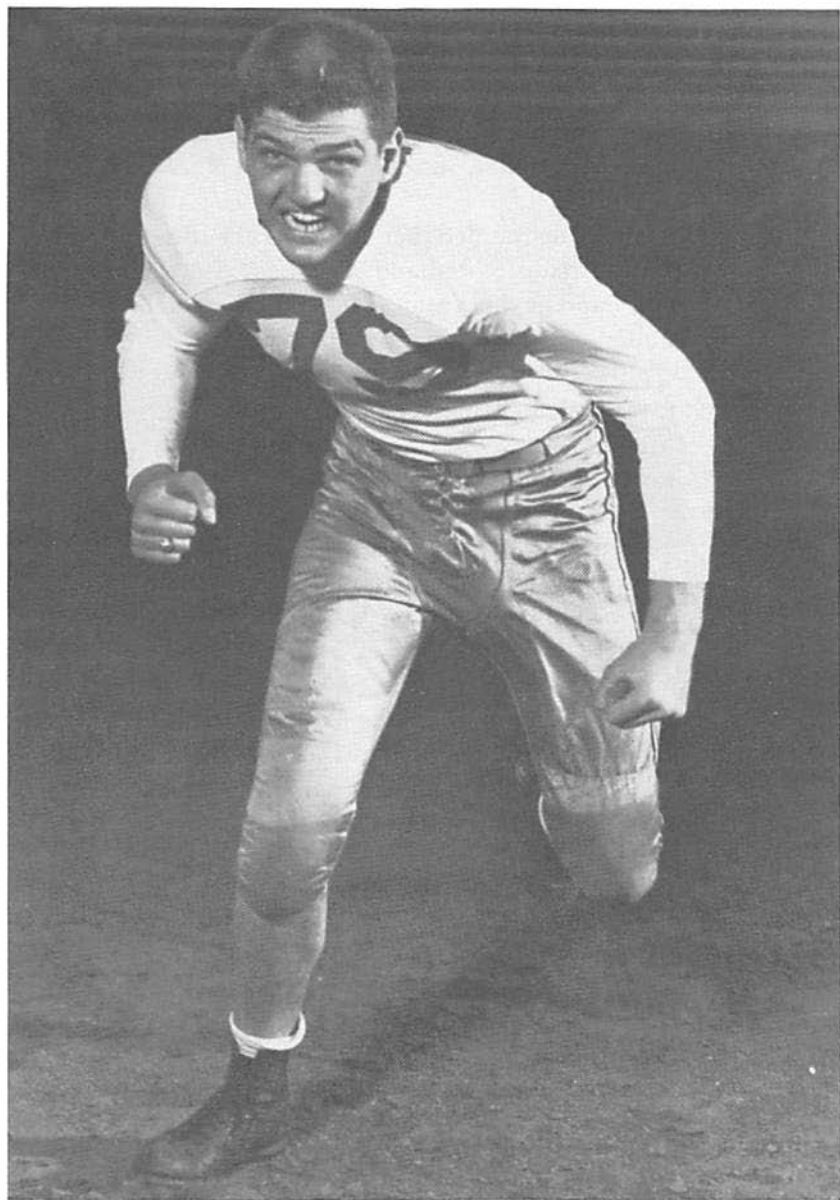
In time, the answer became very evident and simply straightforward. Not much.

In the last scrimmage of Glassford's pre-season training camp at Curtis, Nebraska in 1951, Reynolds suffered a separated shoulder. He missed the first three games of the season, came back to play five in which he was moderately effective, missed another, and then had the last great day of his football career in the season finale. In twenty-six carries, he gained 151 yards against Miami of Florida. The Cornhuskers lost the game anyway, as they were wont to do in that 1951 season when they finished with a 2-8 record.

The next season, 1952, it appeared for three games that Reynolds might yet come back from the havoc injury had wreaked. He played well, if not spectacularly, as the Huskers beat South Dakota, Oregon, and Iowa State in order. But then it struck again. Fate would not let it be. As the Huskers were winning their fourth straight game, as the Huskers seemed off to something big, Reynolds was injured again. As he carried for the eighth time against Kansas State, Reynolds suffered another shoulder separation. He missed two games, and tried to play in four others, but it was of little use. It was no go. And the team died with him. In the last six games of the season, Nebraska recorded a 1-4-1 mark.

After the 1950 season, Bill Glassford, the coach who had so little to do with the success, capitalized. Both Pittsburgh and Minnesota offered Bill jobs. Nebraska wanted desperately to keep him. And so Glassford received a five-year contract that ran through 1955 and contained a five-year renewal clause. In time, the contract would save Glassford his job.

After Reynolds' last two seasons turned into a bitter disappointment, disgruntled Nebraska fans started to consider what manner of man this coach named Bill Glassford was. They started to wonder about his methods, about this training camp that had cost them the joy that would have been if Bobby Reynolds' last two years had been healthy ones. They looked



Jerry Minnick, All-American tackle, 1952
Died Aug. 2, 1996

and they were horrified at what they saw.

As a player, Glassford had been a tough-guy guard and captain for Jock Sutherland's 1936 Pittsburgh team. His style of play was manic, and his nickname was The Baby-Faced Assassin. He was the emotional, ill-tempered Baby Face Nelson of college football.

As a coach, he demanded that his players be the same as he was. It was an unrealistic demand. But he did everything he could think of — and he was a man of ingenuity — to achieve that end. He installed severe training rules. He constructed tortuous devices that physically compelled the players to carry out their assignments properly in practice. There was one tortuous thing that made linemen keep their heads up and tails down while they were practicing blocking.

He also demanded that his players have the same single-minded devotion to football success that he possessed. That, too, was an unrealistic demand. Because football isn't an end-all for the intelligent college student. There are other things, and there should be other things, in his life. But Glassford found a way to achieve even this impossibility — at least during pre-season practice. He held his pre-season drills at the State Agriculture High School in the little town of Curtis, which even in 1970 couldn't muster a population any larger than 1,166. There was nothing to do or think about in Curtis, other than football.

At Curtis, Glassford devised what he felt to be the perfect conditioning regimentation. Players had to run everywhere. To get to the practice field they first had to climb hand-over-hand down the horizontal ladder that was the only exit and entrance from the practice field to the locker room and then run an obstacle course. To get back, after a practice session that often lasted two hours longer than the two hours scheduled, the players had to run the obstacle course in reverse, and, exhausted, climb back up the ladder, hand-over-hand, without any help. If a player received help, he did not receive the next meal.

Finally, after a 1953 season that ended 3-6-1 despite the

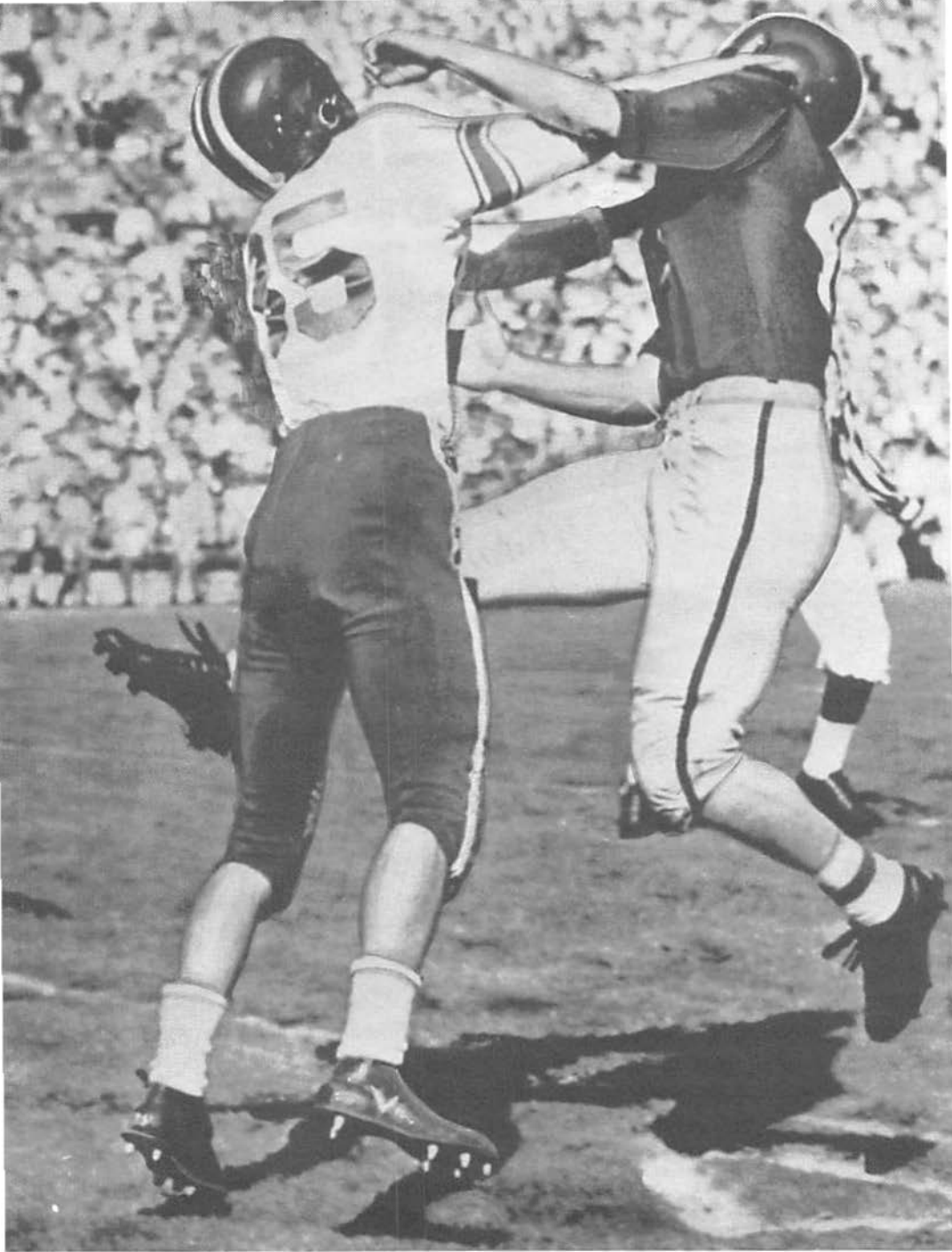
passing heroics of quarterback Johnny Bordogna, it became too much for the players to bear. At season's end, petitions were passed in a secret team meeting. Thirty-five of the players signed the petitions. Eventually, the petitions wound up in the hands of John J. Selleck, the acting university chancellor. He read them. The intent was clear. The University of Nebraska football team was rebelling against its coach. It asked that he be dismissed.

After meeting with the athletic board and the board of regents, Selleck confronted Glassford with the petitions and asked him to resign. Glassford was shaken. But he wouldn't resign on the spot. He had a contract. He huddled with his lawyer, and four days later proved that by the terms of his contract he couldn't be forced to resign. Nebraska was stuck with Bill Glassford for two more years.

Glassford's next move was to meet with the players. Grievances were aired. Some things were settled. The relationship for the next two years would clearly be tolerable if slightly uncomfortable and in no way amicable. And the next year especially was also halfway successful on the playing field.

Oklahoma, of course, won its ninth consecutive championship in 1954, but Nebraska, of which little was expected, managed to finish second in the Big Seven. The Cornhuskers ran up a 4-2 league record, and were 6-4 overall during the regular season. And, because Oklahoma couldn't go to a bowl game that year, the Huskers were invited to meet Duke in the Orange Bowl on January 1, 1955.

It was the first bowl game since Biff Jones's team made it to the Rose Bowl after that glorious 1940 season. But this time there was none of the attendant hoopla. The whole messy business the previous winter had left too much of a bad aftertaste for that. Glassford had some problems that season, too. He couldn't enforce his beloved training rules and regimentation because his authority had been shaken by the challenge petition. Curfew was consistently broken in Miami before the Orange Bowl, and the players had just a grand old time.



1955 Orange Bowl — Duke end Tracy Moon (left) tangles with Nebraska receiver Andrew Loehr on a pass play.

In the game, Nebraska's first national television appearance, Duke just had a grand old time. The Huskers were buried 34-7.

In 1955, things didn't change much. Oklahoma won the conference with an undefeated record again, and this time was able to go to the bowl. Nebraska finished second, but wasn't going anywhere. They were a 5-5 second. After the last home game, a win that preceded the final loss to Oklahoma, Glassford announced that he wouldn't exercise his option to renew the contract for the next five years. He left with a smile on his face, though. A great burden that he had carried stoically for two seasons on a matter of principle, had been lifted.

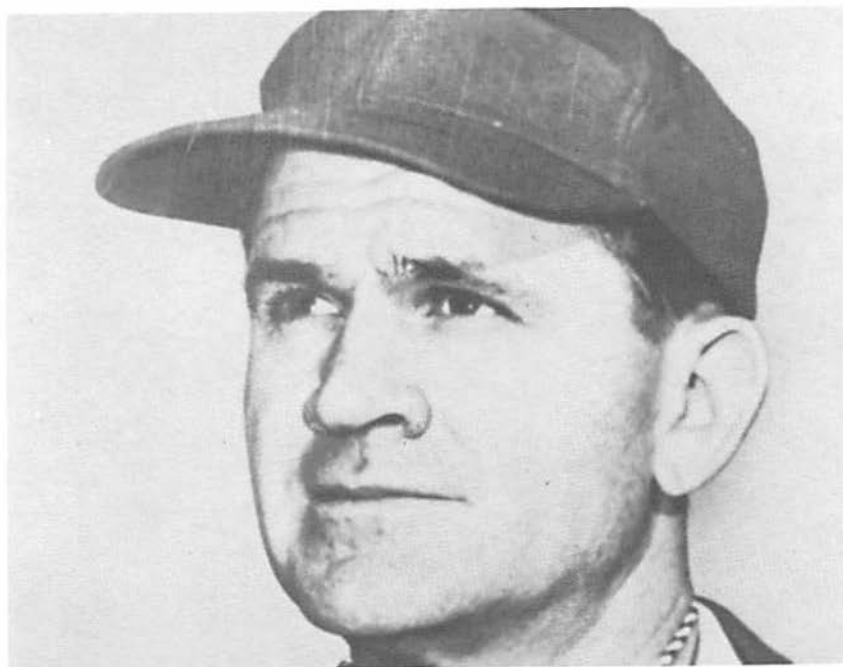
The burden wasn't gone, though. It was just transferred. Right to the shoulders of the men who were going to choose the next football coach. They hadn't done a very good job of selecting a coach for about fifteen years now, and fans were getting tired of having to live with mistakes. But they made one again.

The mistake went by the name of twenty-nine-year-old Pete Elliott. He smiled nice, he looked handsome, he had a pretty wife and a nice manner. He had big ambitions. He was making it quicker and better through the major college coaching ranks than anyone could remember. He had worked for Bud Wilkinson and made a great impression. He was a man destined for coaching greatness.

There was only one trouble. Pete Elliott, the golden boy, wasn't destined to achieve that greatness in Lincoln, Nebraska. Not unless he could do it in one year, because that's all the time Pete Elliott bothered to hang around. Glassford hadn't left Elliott much to work with that year, but the boy genius didn't do badly with it. The 1956 Huskers ran up a 3-3 conference record and were 4-6 altogether. Not bad. The board of regents took notice and gave Elliott a raise from \$12,000 a year to \$14,500. But the University of California also noticed. And a month after Pete Elliott graciously accepted his raise, he graciously said no thank you and went off to seek his



Pete Elliott, Nebraska coach, 1956



Bill Jennings, Nebraska coach, 1957-1961

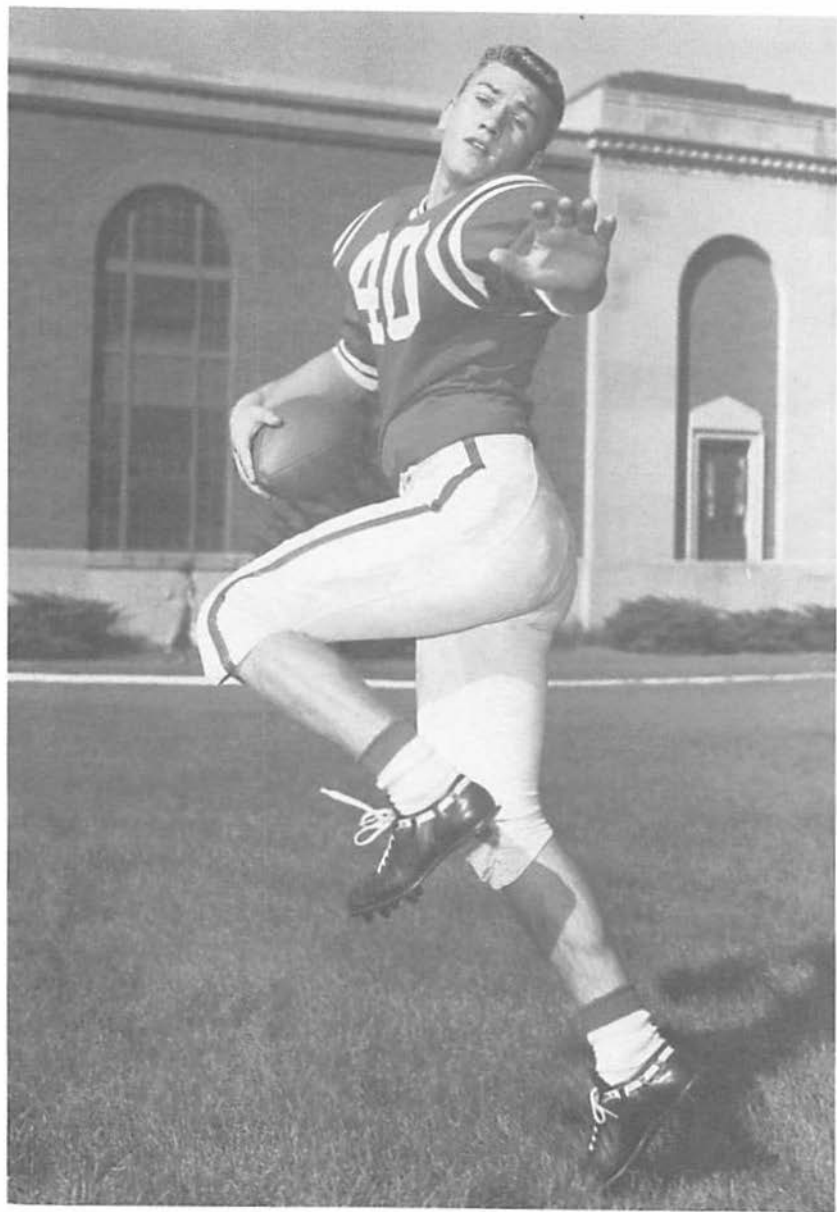
fortune in Berkeley, California.

By leaving in such a rude, curious, and belated hurry, Elliott left the board of regents few options in searching for a new coach. So the job was quickly given to Elliott's top assistant, thirty-eight-year-old Bill Jennings.

They picked wrong again.

Bill Jennings was a nice guy. And a hell of an assistant coach. He was excellent at relating to players. He was a good, hard-working recruiter.

But Bill Jennings wasn't made to be a big-time head coach. He wasn't possessed of the grace under pressure. He was not a good enough organizer. He didn't quite know how to deploy all the talent he could recruit. He was the embodiment of a theory that would later become known as the Peter Princi-



Pat Fischer, Nebraska Football Hall of Fame

ple. He was a man who, after having reached his level of ultimate competence, was forced up the ladder one precarious rung too many.

This was made amply evident when, after being fired by Nebraska officials following the 1961 season, Jennings moved over to Kansas, where, as offensive backfield coach, his job was to teach the game to an unpolished diamond in the rough named Gale Sayers. He didn't do badly at that at all.

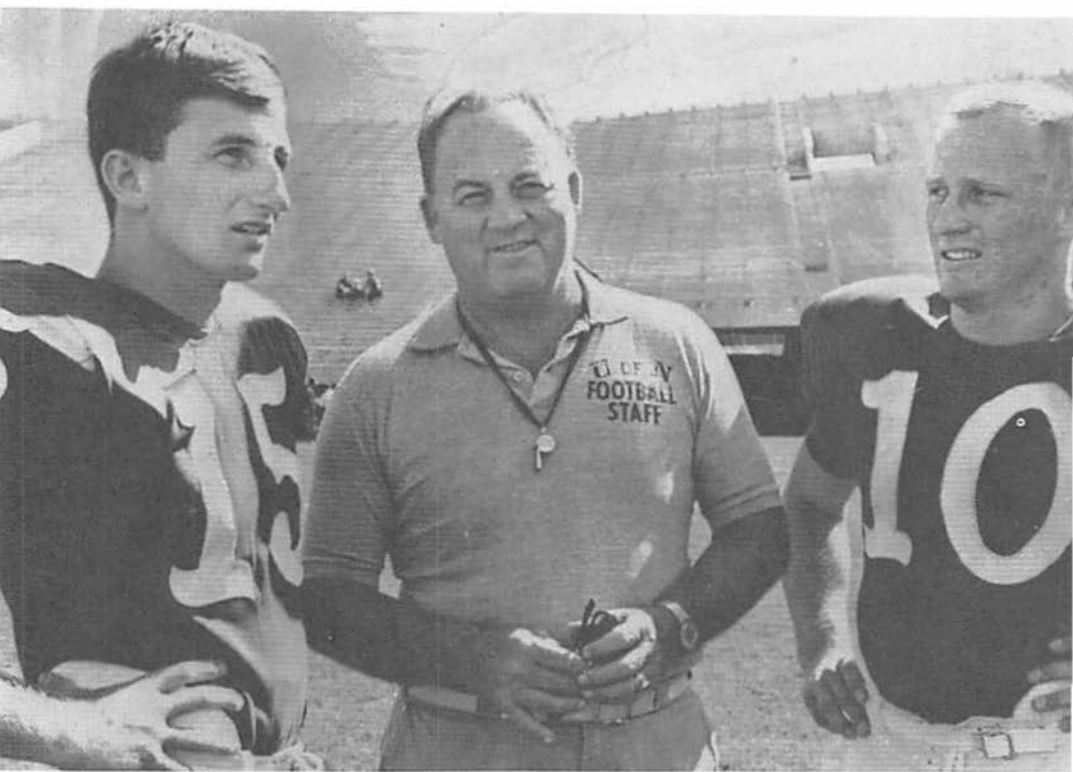
But at Nebraska, Jennings was a horror. Though he helped develop some great talents at Nebraska, talents such as Pat Fischer, Roland McDole, Mick Tingelhoff, and Thunder Thornton; though he coached the 1959 Nebraska team that handed Wilkinson's Oklahoma its first Big Eight defeat since 1944 by a 25-21 score, and though he repeated the feat a year later, Bill Jennings was simply a failure at Nebraska.

His records, from 1957 through 1961, were, successively, 1-9, 3-7, 4-6, 4-6, and 3-6-1.

Finally, the succession of failures became too much for the university chancellor, Clifford Hardin, to bear. Hardin was a devoted football fan, and he wanted to watch a winner.

That's what Clifford Hardin told Bill Jennings on a December day when he called him into his office after that 1961 season had ended. He told him that and something else. He told him he felt just right for embarking on an era of unparalleled success.

Or at least that's the way the legend goes.



Bob Devaney with Bob Churchich (left) and Fred Duda at the start of the 1965 season.

11

The Right Man

Clifford Hardin wasn't going to hire any Golden Boys. Pete Elliott had convinced him of that. And Clifford Hardin wasn't going to hire any promising bright young assistants. Bill Jennings had convinced him of that. Instead, Hardin harked back to the glory days. He noticed that D. X. Bible had come to Nebraska after many years as a head coach elsewhere. He noticed that Biff Jones came armed with experience. Clifford Hardin assumed the burden for finding a coach and decided he wanted a man like those men.

Rumors were circulating that Duffy Daugherty, the Michigan State coach, was available. Hardin called Duffy, whom he knew from his days as a dean at Michigan State, and offered him the Nebraska job. Duffy responded that the rumors were unfounded, he wasn't available, but that he knew the right man for the job. The man, Duffy said, used to be an assistant at Michigan State, and now he was the head coach at Wyoming. His name is Bob Devaney, Duffy told Hardin, and you ought to look him up.

Clifford Hardin said thanks, and looked Bob Devaney up. He was doing most of the work himself, because William Henry Harrison (Tippy) Dye had just assumed the duties of athletic director, and wasn't settled in the job yet.

Several days after he got the call from Hardin, on a gray day in late December, Bob Devaney came to Lincoln. He arrived in a DC-6, using the name Mr. R. Roberts. At the airport, Mr. Roberts, who was allegedly a salesman, was met by Carl Donaldson, then the university purchasing agent.

Donaldson showed Mr. Roberts around the campus. Then late in the afternoon, Donaldson showed Mr. Roberts movies of the 1961 Nebraska football team. Mr. Roberts liked what he saw. He said that he thought Bill Jennings had recruited some fine material. Mr. Roberts, the traveling salesman, was sold. He agreed to become Nebraska's new football coach.

There was just one hang-up. Bob Devaney, who had run up a 35-10-5 record in his five seasons as the head coach at Wyoming, had been rewarded for his efforts with a new five-year contract. He had to be released from it. It is common practice that when a man gets a better-paying, more prestigious coaching job, his old employers let him out of his contract. But the University of Wyoming officials were going to make Bob Devaney sweat a little bit. They didn't release Devaney from his contract for a month. So Devaney divided his time that month between campuses, keeping both staffs organized, and when the release finally came through, he was ready to earn his \$17,000 a year in Lincoln.

It was quite a position for a man who had never really intended to become a football coach at all. Especially a 46-year-old man, who just eleven years before had been ready to forget about coaching altogether.

Devaney was born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan. He was raised mostly by his mother, because his father was a sailor on the Great Lakes iron ore boats and was rarely home. In high school, Devaney played football, basketball, and baseball. But he was no star, and when he didn't get a scholarship upon

graduation from Saginaw High School, he thought his schooling was completed.

This was in 1933, in the middle of the Great Depression. Money was scarce, and so were jobs, so Devaney was rather pleased when he landed a job in the Chevrolet foundry.

"I was happy to have a job. But one day I woke up to the realization that there must be an easier way to make a living than spending the rest of my life in a foundry. I decided to go to college," he says.

He decided to go to Alma College, a small school in a nearby town of the same name. He decided to go to school there, but without any pretenses of being a coach.

"No," Devaney says, "I didn't ever think about being a coach. Not until my last year of college. I was planning to go into business. I started taking things like accounting. My uncle worked for Remington-Rand, and he seemed to be doing well enough, and it seemed like a decent way to make a living. But then, after taking three years of business courses, I found out it just wasn't for me. So I went and talked to my college football coach."

The coach told Devaney, who between waiting tables and pumping gas to pay for tuition, found time to become Alma's captain and all-conference end, about the coaching and teaching business. And in his senior year, Devaney took all the education credits he needed, preparing to become a high school coach and teacher in Michigan.

He graduated in the spring of 1939, and in August, he finally found a job to support him and his wife, Phyllis, whom he had married in 1936. He was to coach football and basketball and teach six subjects a day at Big Beaver High School in Birmingham, Michigan.

After Big Beaver, there was a succession of jobs. In Saginaw, in Keego Harbor, and finally at Alepna High School on Lake Huron, where his teams won 52 of 61 football games.

He was 37 by then, and a man without any delusions of grandeur. He seemed forever destined to be one of those

underpaid, very respected high school coaches. Until one summer day, that is, when, to the everlasting gratitude of the Nebraska football fans, Duffy Daugherty called and offered a job as an assistant at Michigan State.

"I just happened to be in from the lake when Duffy called," Devaney says. "If he had not reached me, he would have called somebody else. I have no illusions about that. But I had made up my mind. I was 37. If a break didn't come before I was 40, I was going to go back and get my masters and take a boring administrative job somewhere."

That break came in 1953, and it was only another three years before 41-year-old Bob Devaney got his first head coaching job. Phil Dickins had left Wyoming for Indiana, and Devaney applied for the job at Laramie. With Daugherty and Michigan State Athletic Director Biggie Munn recommending him, Devaney was chosen by Wyoming. Now, Devaney says the secret of his success at Wyoming, which was considerable, was simple. He could get the necessary bodies into school. The president of the school was from the South, enjoyed football, and was sympathetic to his needs. In fact, the president openly yearned for the good old days when college players got paid off behind the chicken coop.

But Wyoming was not the real big time, and when Nebraska came calling in 1962, offering an opportunity to achieve national success, Bob Devaney was an eager taker.

Before retiring to a full-time position as athletic director after the 1972 season, Devaney achieved that success—many times over. He started with an 8-2 record the first year, and took the team to the Gotham Bowl. After that, it was better most of the time. By the time he coached his final game in the 1973 Orange Bowl against Notre Dame, Devaney had accumulated a 101-20-2 record at Nebraska. Seventeen of the twenty-one Nebraska seasons before Devaney had been losing ones, but he turned it around. He turned it around with a remarkable .829 winning percentage. He turned it around with nine bowl games and seven Big Eight championships in eleven

seasons.

He turned it around by being a good recruiter—he has often said that he saw no reason to deprive a boy of the opportunity to play football for Nebraska just because he happened to come from New York or New Jersey or California or Las Vegas. He turned it around by being truly colorblind. Once, a group of players formed a black caucus and went to him with a list of "suggestions," and then realized there was nothing to ask for; that Devaney was a fair man who dealt with them without prejudice. He turned it around without being a driving tyrant who alienated his players. Once at a luncheon before the Sun Bowl he was introduced and received a three-minute standing ovation from his players. "You would absolutely die for Coach Devaney," says one former player.

George Kelly was an assistant under Devaney from that first year until February 1969 when he left to become the linebacker coach at Notre Dame. He admires Devaney and his success.

"He's an outstanding football coach," says Kelly. "He's an easygoing guy who demands respect. He's a fine game coach; he always has command of what's going on on the field, even though he leaves the practice coaching to his assistants. When he got to Nebraska I had already been there for a year, and there's no question that the program was in total disarray. But he knew what to do to organize it. He was amazed at how much talent there was, and he knew exactly what to do with it. He always seemed to be playing people in the right positions.

"But the key things were his recruiting and the way he gets along with people. Everybody likes him. The kids liked him. The townspeople liked him. He would just go into these small towns in Nebraska and sit in the bars and entertain people.

"He was an extremely active recruiter. He lived on the road in the off season. And he was well-organized as a recruiter. We recruited the state, and took twenty to twenty-four kids. But we realized that wasn't enough, and we went out of state to get the rest of the kids. In Nebraska, we would have to redshirt

a lot of the kids, because they just weren't ready. West of Lincoln in a lot of places, they still just play eight-man football.

"And Devaney always seemed to get along with the kids. The kids played for him. They liked playing for him. He wasn't a screamer, he always seemed calm, he always seemed to relate to their problems individually."

So those were the qualities an assistant saw that made Bob Devaney a winner. Those, and the fact that he employed some very sound football principles. He used the multiple offense with several variations that was so successful for so long at Michigan State. And he used a sound, five-man front defense. He used them and he won endlessly.

And for all that winning, Bob Devaney never changed fundamentally as a person very much at all. Sure, he became more sophisticated, and less private as celebrity status was thrust upon him, as he became more popularly known than the governors of the state, as he was chosen Nebraska's man of the year by the Omaha *World-Herald*.

But still he was good old, friendly Bob Devaney from Saginaw, Michigan. The self-effacing, unpretentious man who never forgot that there was a \$35-a-week foundry job with no future once in his life.

He was a man who despite the fact that he beat them as regularly as the wind blows through Lincoln in December, never alienated opposing coaches. The only reaction he got from most of them was admiration.

Pepper Rodgers of Georgia Tech, who opposed Devaney at both Kansas and UCLA, may have said it the best.

"He's a man I would like even if he weren't a coach," Rodgers said before the 1971 season. "But he is and he may be the best. To be a successful coach, what do you have to have?

"A good staff with good morale. That's first. Most of Devaney's assistants have been with him since he was at Wyoming. He pays them good. He relies on them. Head coaches don't coach much on the field anymore, so you've got to have guys who are loyal and won't watch the clock. Next, you have

to have a good athletic director. He's the athletic director (he assumed the post in 1967 when Dye left for Northwestern). He's a good one.

"And then, then you got to have the rapport with players. That's the key to the whole thing. You can have the best players in the world and lose if they won't play for you. It's like the dog food salesman. His boss says, 'We've got the best dog food on the market, right?' 'Right.' 'Well, how come we don't sell more dog food?' The salesman says, 'Well, I guess it's because the dogs won't eat it.' At Nebraska, the good players play for Devaney."

They certainly did.



Bob Brown, All-American guard, 1963

12

The Devaney Era

Talk about football dynasties. Talk about Bob Devaney. The two are synonymous. What Devaney did at Nebraska is mind-numbing. It was a complete transformation. Not only in the won-lost record, but in the entire atmosphere and image of the school. In the Devaney decade, Nebraska grew, and it was almost a spontaneous growth, from an acceptable, representative major participant to an absolute powerhouse that bestrode college football like a red colossus.

Almost any statistic tells the story of the Devaney decade — eight Big Eight titles; nine bowl trips in eleven years; three straight Orange Bowl victories; back-to-back national championships; thirty-two consecutive games without a defeat; twenty-two All-American and seventy-two All-Big eight selections during those years, as well as virtually countless national and conference awards to the coach, the team, and the individual players.

There is another statistic that tells the story of Devaney's success at Nebraska. Four times Memorial Stadium underwent

grafting operations, until it was enlarged from 30,000 to 76,000 seats. Still they sell out and are unable to fill the clamor for seats. The story is told of friends of a deceased ticket holder dropping by the house after the funeral, not so much to express their condolences as to inquire about the disposition of the tickets.

Such is the miracle Devaney wrought.

Through it all Devaney changed little from the potato-faced man in the rumpled suit. Perhaps success did not disturb or puff him because it was so long in coming. Sitting in his homey little red office, done up in red carpeting, red rug, red desk, with the endless flow of secretaries, assistant coaches, and players dropping in for a chat, he could be the same guy coaching at his own mater of Alma. His one concession to success was his huge leather swivel chair, done in red leather, of course.

The droll gingerliness of his inward wit punctures any balloons of pomposity. He praised the Nebraska fans, saying they were "understanding in defeat, but I wouldn't want to put them to a serious test."

His campus life was lived out of the smallish, modestly furnished home on an elm-lined middle-class street of Lincoln. Evenings free from the cares and requirements of coaching, those odd, rare evenings at home, he would spend with his wife, Phyllis, sipping a combination of milk and bourbon. Shoes off, just plain folks, Devaney.

Some coaches put their stamp on the game by a series of what we can call intellectual approaches or maneuvers. They devise a system for moving the ball from point to point. Or, they devise a system for preventing other teams from moving the ball from point to point. Their contribution is to the science of the game. They are imitated and accorded fame as systematizers. Others are stern taskmasters who by force of will literally drive their teams to success.

Devaney was not cut in any of those molds. His strength lay simply in his ability to get the players and then getting

them to play for him once they were there. It sounds simple, but ask yourself, how many Bob Devaneys are there?

So at the age of forty-six Bob Devaney came out of the mountains of Wyoming to Lincoln and made that school out on the low flat prairie into a national institution. And any examiners of his success must be aware of the droll sense of humor that buttressed it.

A smart, exceptionally quick-witted man, he was a great recruiter because he could talk crop rotation to the farmers and profit and loss with the bankers. Each man in his own language—if they had sons who could play football.

"Is it true," Devaney was asked, "if you have gone so far as to sing 'Bringing in the Sheaves' with a mother to get her son to come to Nebraska?"

"Yes, I did that," Devaney replied. "The mother came to Nebraska and the boy enrolled at Missouri."

To talk of the miracle, the resurrection of the team that had had seventeen losing seasons in the previous twenty-one, is to talk mainly about Devaney's sense of humor. He won't let it be told any other way. His approach to his team is based on understanding, and part of that understanding is that neither he nor they take themselves too seriously—on the surface, at least.

Bob Brown, the tackle who became an All-Pro with Philadelphia and Los Angeles, was on Devaney's first two teams at Nebraska, the teams of 1962 and 1963. Brown had a reputation as a malingerer. He nursed minor bruises like mortal wounds. He missed as many practices as he could. Finally in the spring Devaney had the manager remove Brown's uniform and tear the taped-on name from his locker.

Brown came to his office to find out the reason. Devaney, in a straight deadpan, told the giant tackle that the coaches had decided that Brown should give up contact sports. "We recommend golf, or maybe tennis, where you can use your strength without getting hurt." The six-foot, four-inch, 270-pound Brown cried for reinstatement. That fall Brown made

All-Big Eight and the following year All-American.

Hard and fast rules of conduct are not the kinds of things Bob Devaney worried about. He didn't lay down any rules that would back him into corners. No one had to dress or wear their hair or shave their beard or moustache because Bob Devaney ordered him to do so. He said that coaches who insisted on doing that kind of thing "are coaches who wound up losing face or losing their jobs."

The funny thing about playing football at Nebraska for Devaney, one of his former players, a star on the back-to-back national champions, said, was that sooner or later you became not only a player, but a fan as well.

The success of Nebraska football under Devaney, said another, was not so much due to dedicated players as it was to dedicated coaches. "Football's a big business here. The whole state is involved. The coaches know it and they coach that way. More meetings, more films, more everything.

"The coaches made themselves accessible. You need help in a science course, they get you a tutor. 'Where do I go to buy tires?' 'What am I going to do about this girl?' They were always there.

"The big thing was the closeness. The players got along. No race problems, no nothing. When you made a block for Kinney, he let you know he appreciated it. Tagge was the same.

"We were a partying team. Devaney knew it. I think he encouraged it. He's strict, but he knows what it's all about. Nobody really hassled you, but there was kind of an unspoken rule. As long as what you did didn't wind up in the newspapers you were safe.

"Nebraska's not as conservative as you'd think. It's not Berkeley, but the girls behave the same here as any place. And when they have a demonstration all five or six campus radicals show up."

Even when things did hit the newspapers it wasn't necessarily fatal, because Devaney believes most devoutly in the

fundamental principle of the second chance. He believes most fervently in football's power to heal and redeem. He was under a great deal of pressure when his star flanker and breakaway runner, Johnny Rodgers, was involved in a gas station holdup in May of 1970. There was strong feeling in some quarters that Devaney should banish Rodgers from the squad. The court placed the team's leading pass receiver on two years' probation. A student-faculty committee took no action. Devaney wrestled with himself and then placed Rodgers on probation also, leaving him free to play. Not everyone was pleased. There were even snickers over self-serving justice. Devaney said that everything would have been easier if Rodgers had been a fourth-team player. Then he could have put him on probation and have been praised for his humanitarian spirit.

Rodgers added some more gray to Devaney's few remaining strands of hair when he was sentenced to thirty days in jail for driving on a suspended license at a time when he was still on probation for the gas station escapade.

There was nothing Devaney could do except plead for more probation. The judge said the law required the jail time, but pointed out to the tearful Rodgers that if a felony didn't end his football career then certainly a misdemeanor shouldn't interfere with it. Luckily for the Nebraska team, the sentence was served during the summer.

Bob Terrio, who played linebacker and coached for him, said that it was Devaney who kept him in school. He remembered the first day he arrived in Lincoln. It was during the winter months. The sun was shining but when he stepped off the plane that brought him from southern California he was met by an icy blast off the Great Plains. His first thought was to get right back on the plane, but he stayed. He said he stayed because of Devaney, and partly because of the attractive schedule the team played, the bowl games, and the promised trip to Hawaii.

There was another blow in store for Terrio. The coaches told him he was being redshirted. "It was a terrible letdown,"

he said. "I'd always been first string wherever I played, whatever I played. I thought, 'Do I have to put up with the weather and this, too? For an extra year? Why am I here?' I did think of going home. But I had never quit anything in my life and I didn't want to start now.

"That Easter I got married, and in the fall, even though I was a red shirt, Coach Devaney included us in the Sun Bowl trip. We had a great time. I never really thought about quitting again."

In 1961, Nebraska had won three games and had scored an average of 11 points a game, one a game for each offensive player. In 1962, Devaney's first year, they won nine games and averaged better than 32 points a game.

Devaney had said he had seen more than a little talent looking at those Nebraska game films, and now he began proving it. South Dakota was the first victim, by a big score, but that was expected. What happened the following week wasn't, though, when the Devaney-coached Huskers, playing in their first big game under him, ripped mighty Michigan, pride of the Big Ten 25-13.

People didn't just sit up and take notice, they came bolt upright out of their chairs. What kind of team was this that could lose and lose for so many years and now suddenly break the mold and pound the supposedly ferocious Wolverines right into the turf? Well, they got the answer over the next month or so, as the Huskers went on to win after win, four more, including victories over North Carolina State and Colorado, until they stood at 6 and 0 for the season.

The perfect record came to an end the following sun-swept Saturday, when the Huskers and the Tigers of Missouri locked in one of their traditional battles and the fearsome Missouri defense held the until-now potent Husker scoring machine to one lone touchdown.

Defeat is always bitter for winners, and Devaney was a winner, and he was molding his team to be a winner, to think like winners, to act like winners, to expect to win every time they

took the field, until the thought of not winning was entirely alien to them. Now he brought them back and brought them back like winners.

The legend of Gale Sayers was already beginning to throw its shadow across the playing fields of the Big Eight conference, but if he expected to move like a scythe through the Cornhuskers he was in for a bitter disappointment. Devaney not only brought his boys back from the frustration at Missouri, he brought them back most convincingly, burying the Kansas Jayhawks 40-16.

If perfection in college football is 10 and 0, then 9 and 1 must be next to perfection and that is what the Huskers were striving for when they went up against Oklahoma in the final game of the season. Strive as they might, though, it wasn't to be, as the Sooners rolled to an easy win. It was the start of a tradition of another sort, the sort that legends are not built on. Over the years, the Devaney years, the Oklahoma Sooners were the fiercest competition the Huskers faced. They are the only Big Eight team to hold an edge over Devaney, beating him one more time than he beat them. Oklahoma, in fact, holds nearly one third of the total wins over Nebraska during the Devaney years. It's staggering to think of what the Devaney record would have looked like without Oklahoma.

But that was not quite the end. There was one more game. The team had received, and the players voted to accept, an invitation to play in what was called the Gotham Bowl. It wasn't one of your mainstay, super-duper, three-day festival of hoopla major bowl games where people by the millions caught your act, but still it was a bowl game, only the third in the team's history, and the opponent was no pushover, Miami of Florida, with a quarterback who wore white shoes and who liked to dance around that backfield like George Gipp doing his imitation of Fred Astaire. He went by the name of George Mira.

What a game it turned out to be. The fellows in the broadcasting booth like to yell into their mikes that "We got a real barn-burner here!" Well, they did. It was. No doubt about



LaVerne Allers, All-American guard, 1966

it.

Mira flew around like a water bug in a typhoon. He passed and ran and directed his team to an almost unbelievable thirty-four first downs. He passed for way over 300 yards, but every time he put some points on the board, the Huskers stung them right back. They made only twelve first downs all day, but they showed Mira that they knew a bit about the long bomb and the big play out on the Great Plains, too.

Following one Mira touchdown pass, Willie Ross struck right back with a 92-yard scoring kickoff return. He also broke loose for a 41-yard run to set up another score, and he and Dennis Claridge and Bill "Thunder" Thornton became the first crop of Devaney heros.

Only 6,166 fans sat shivering in cavernous Yankee Stadium in the sub-freezing temperatures as the game went down to the final seconds, and only an interception stopped Mira's attempt to pull it out. The Huskers themselves had to come from behind with only 2:50 left in the game when Thornton cracked over from the one to take the lead 36-34.

Mira passed them silly, but they won. After the game, during the jubilation of the warm locker room, dripping wet from the shower his happy team had just administered to him, Devaney got up on one of the benches and told his boys, with a happy allusion to the way Miami was able to move the ball on them, "You've made me famous. I've received a number of offers to lecture on defense."

Compared to what came before, that season was a tremendous, almost overwhelming, success, made even more glittering by the fact that it was so unexpected. Respectability, yes, but a bowl win and national ranking so soon was enough to turn the head of even the most cautious Husker booster.

Devaney was aware of that. Perhaps he would have preferred the climb to be not quite so spectacular, because each season is its own encore, and over the years a coach's only competition comes from himself. Now, already, he was at the point where he could hardly improve on himself. It would be

difficult enough to even maintain that kind of record. How many perfect seasons are there in a coach's lifetime? How many for Rockne, Leahy, Hayes, the Bear, McKay, Darrell, and the rest?

Precious few, Devaney knew. It took perfect execution by every member of the team, players as well as coaches, not just for a game or two, a big game, but for every play of every game over the course of the entire season. It took luck and breaks so that key personnel did not suffer disabling injuries. It took the hope that officials' calls did not go against you. Which brings up another Bob Devaney story.

John McKay brought his usual Southern California powerhouse to Lincoln one year and in the first half he watched his team penalized four times for pass interference. He was livid, and on the way to the dressing room at halftime was muttering to himself, when suddenly by his side there was Bob Devaney. "Well, John, how do you like my brother's officiating?" Devaney grinned.

Mostly though, it would take work, hard work, and long, long hours of hard work. That Devaney knew for sure.

He not only organized the team, he organized the town. He organized the state. All of Lincoln and most of Nebraska went red. Like an old tenting evangelist Devaney traveled the length of the state preaching the gospel of Americanism and Cornhusker football. He found the soil fertile and he planted among them Nebraska's Booster Club, among the country's largest, and he asked not how much you gave, only that you gave, because the kingdom of Cornhusker football was big enough for even the smallest pocketbook. There was a plan for every budget. For as little as \$1, a Nebraskan could become a member of the Extra Point Club. For \$2,000, to take the opposite end of the scale, a Husker could qualify for Section 300—seats in the plush new press box (this is a couple of years ahead of our story) where members sat in upholstered chairs and had the crowd noises piped in but none of the grit.

Devaney even organized the state's cattlemen. It is called

the Husker Beef Club, made up of cattlemen who pledge to contribute annually some 200 butchered prime steers for the Cornhuskers to consume each year at their training table rites.

The message of Nebraska football has been so deeply implanted that now wherever they travel they are accompanied by a literal horde of red-clothed, red-booted, red-hatted, and red-blanketed zealots. Pepper Rodgers, who coached against Devaney at Kansas before moving on to UCLA, was constantly amazed at the size of the crowds that took to the road with their team. Commenting on the almost 20,000 who went with the team to Lawrence for one game, Rodgers in Devaney-like fashion cracked to Devaney, "One of these days I'd like to play you at home."

Devaney also organized his football team, and he organized it around and with regard to the young men who would be representing their school. Like all good, thoughtful coaches, Devaney knew that each player makes a valuable contribution, but that that contribution is not normally recognized. The glory goes to the quarterbacks, the running backs, the wide receivers — the fellows who score the points get the hurrahs. He knew also that defense was at least 60 percent of the game but that the defensive players as a group were, to most people in the stands, just that anonymous gang of guys who stood around on the field until the next time the offense, the glory boys, got their hands on the ball.

There wasn't much that Devaney could do about that individually, but there was something he could do about it collectively. And he did. He organized the defenders into a ball-hunting pack and called them the Black Shirts. Their identity as a group was fortified by the black jerseys he had them wear during the weekday practices, and their destructive spirit was consolidated within this group.

He was, as most good coaches must be, a great instinctive psychologist. Bob Terrio said that he felt so high the first day he walked into the locker room for practice and found that first-team black jersey hanging in his locker that he would



1964 Orange Bowl — The Nebraska offense. Line, from left: Tony Jeter, Lloyd Voss, Bob Brown, Ron Michka, John Kirby, Larry Kramer, Larry Tomlinson. Backfield, from left: Robert Hohn, Rudy Johnson, Dennis Claridge, Willie Ross.

have scrimmaged wearing nothing but that jersey and then felt sorry for the padded guys he would have been hitting. It was something that he would never forget in his life.

With a taste for bowl games now, Devaney and his Huskers went into the 1963 season secretly hoping that perhaps everything would fall into place for them. The schedule was tough, but they knew how far they had come and how much they had improved over the previous season. They aimed high and in their first three games clobbered South Dakota State, got past stubborn Minnesota, and coasted by Iowa State. But they were gunned down by the Air Force. Coach Ben Martin thought he saw something in the Nebraska pass defense, especially watching those films of the Gotham Bowl where George Mira drove them dizzy. Apparently he did, because the Air Force walked off the field ahead 17-13 when the final gun sounded. It would prove to be the only loss of the year.

Devaney knew they should have won that game on the sheer strength of his personnel. They didn't, but he also knew

that they were a little lucky when a couple of missed extra points gave them a 13-12 win over Missouri and 4-point win over Oklahoma State. But there was nothing lucky about beating the Oklahoma Sooners in the final regular season game. They did it convincingly and it gave them their first conference title since back in 1940, under Biff Jones, when the Big Eight was still the Big Six. It was to be the first in a string of four consecutive Devaney-coached conference championships.

Their 9-1 regular season record put them way up in the national rankings, sixth in the Associated Press poll and fifth in the UPI poll, a lofty, heady atmosphere they hadn't inhaled since that Biff Jones team of 1940. Now it wasn't the Gotham Bowl, it was the big ones who came calling, and when the Big Red answered they said they wanted the Oranges.

Auburn was the opponent and the Tigers were led by their great coach, Shug Jordan, and their All-American quarterback, Jimmy Sidle. It was the second time in the Orange Bowl for the Huskers. Eight years earlier, in 1955, the Duke Blue Devils had blown them out. The second time around brought redemption, though, and that's one of Devaney's favorite themes, isn't it?

Nebraska, it turned out, had quite a quarterback of its own, and while his ability to run the ball may have surpassed his talent for throwing it, he managed to get the most out of what he did best. With the huge throng of 72,647, one of the largest crowds until then ever to watch the Huskers, barely in their seats, Dennis Claridge moved down parallel to the line of scrimmage, faked a handoff to the fullback, faked a pitch back to the trailing halfback and then cut upfield in the hole created by the end and linebacker. He made one more quick cut to the outside to get to the sideline and then it was a race for the goal line. Two Tigers were left in pursuit, but the last one to have a shot at him missed at about the Auburn 20-yard line. The 68-yard scoring run on the second play from scrimmage set an Orange Bowl record, and the Huskers had a lead



1964 Orange Bowl — Dennis Claridge, Nebraska quarterback, outruns Auburn's Billy Edge (27) and Tucker Frederickson (20) for a 68-yard touchdown run on the second play of the game.

they never relinquished.

Shug Jordon's teams play tough defense, and the Huskers never penetrated the Tigers' goal line again that day. But they did kick through two field goals and the Black Shirts showed



that they, too, could play defensive football. When it was all over the score read 13-7 in favor of Nebraska. A national power lived in Lincoln.

They didn't stop there, either. The following year they just kept right on rolling. Rolling is the right word for it, too. They pounded their way through nine straight opponents, making it a string of sixteen consecutive victories since the loss to the Air Force, and challenging for the number 1 position in

the national polls. They had their second straight Big Eight title wrapped up, and then ran smack into a supercharged Oklahoma team on the final day of the season. It was a bitter, bitter disappointment as they went down 17 to 7, on that raw day out on the plains, and they fell to sixth in the national rankings.

Still, though, there was a chance for redemption. The Huskers were scheduled to face the Razorbacks of Arkansas on New Year's Day in the Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas, the champions of the Southwest meeting the champions of the Big Eight.

All day long the Black Shirts were virtually impregnable, as from midway through the second quarter on they valiantly defended a 7-3 lead. But in the fourth quarter, slowly, grudgingly, tiringly, they gave ground before an inexorable Arkansas drive that started on their own 20-yard line. Finally, with only 4:50 left to play, Bob Burnett found a hole off the left side and lunged into the end zone to win it for the Razorbacks.

From a perfect season they had fallen to two straight losses in their last two games. Before there was any looking around, searching out the causes of failure, Devaney stepped in. He pointed out to his team and staff how far they had come in so short a time. He reminded them that they were excellent football players, and that their future looked even more promising than their past.

Always it came back to the players. Devaney stressed over and again that the success of Nebraska football rested on the players themselves. But underlying that was his relationship with his teams and with each individual. Some call this "handling." But Devaney didn't "handle" his players. He gave them an opportunity to develop and display their talent to the best of their ability.

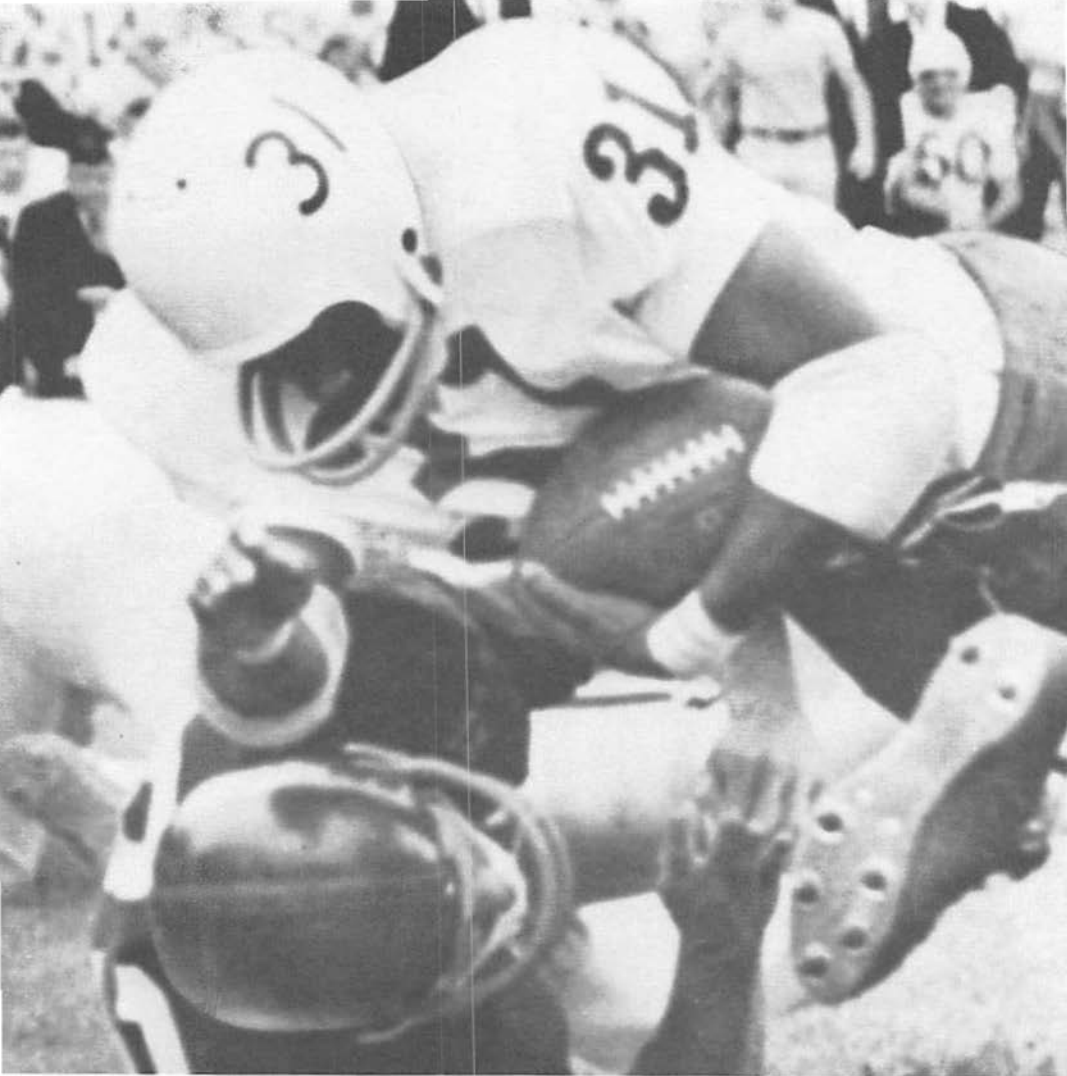
Now that may sound obvious. But it isn't so obvious that every football coach in America practices it. In fact, for most men who run collegiate football programs the term *martinet*



1965 Cotton Bowl — The Nebraska offense. Line, from left: Tony Jeter, Dennis Carlson, Ron Griesse, Lyle Sittler, John Dervin, Larry Kramer, Freeman White. Backfield, from left: Bob Hohn, Bob Churchich, Frank Solich, Kent McCloughan.

would describe them much more effectively than *coach*. They rule, and rule autocratically, rather than coach, to try to assist a young man in the development of his talents. The good ones, though, coach. The winners, the Devaneys, don't try to force and jam a system into players who might not be suited for that system. Rather, they adapt their system to obtain the best possible results with the personnel on hand.

There is no such thing as a typical Devaney team. He adjusts, and adjusts admirably to the talent at hand. At Wyoming his teams were quick, high-scoring, and exciting. His first Nebraska teams resembled the silos stretching from end to end across the grain belt. To be charitable, they were a



1965 Cotton Bowl — Nebraska halfback Harry Wilson (31) scores from the one.

bit oxlike. There wasn't much he could do about that, either. Those first few years he was working with the products of Bill Jennings' recruiting. But gradually his teams changed until in his finest products they were that rare combination of size and speed that is virtually unconquerable.

Always, though, it came back to the boys themselves. Football players need, demand, and appreciate two things from their coach: they want to be treated like men, and they



Larry Kramer, All-American tackle, 1964

want a chance, a legitimate chance, to demonstrate what they can do.

Again, that might sound obvious, but many coaches simply arbitrarily switch a player from position to position, from offense to defense, or even just discourage or ignore a player because of some apparent physical deficiency. Like size.

Most coaches have firm requirements in mind when they think in terms of specific positions. None even think about the young man of five-feet seven or five-feet eight and 165 or 170.

They are simply shoved aside as too small while the coach moves on to the bigger man. Not so Devaney. Some of Devaney's biggest stars simply wouldn't fulfill the height and weight requirements of most coaches.

Johnny Rodgers, the Heisman Trophy winner of 1972, for all his marvelous gifts, would have sat on the bench at many schools as too small and too light.

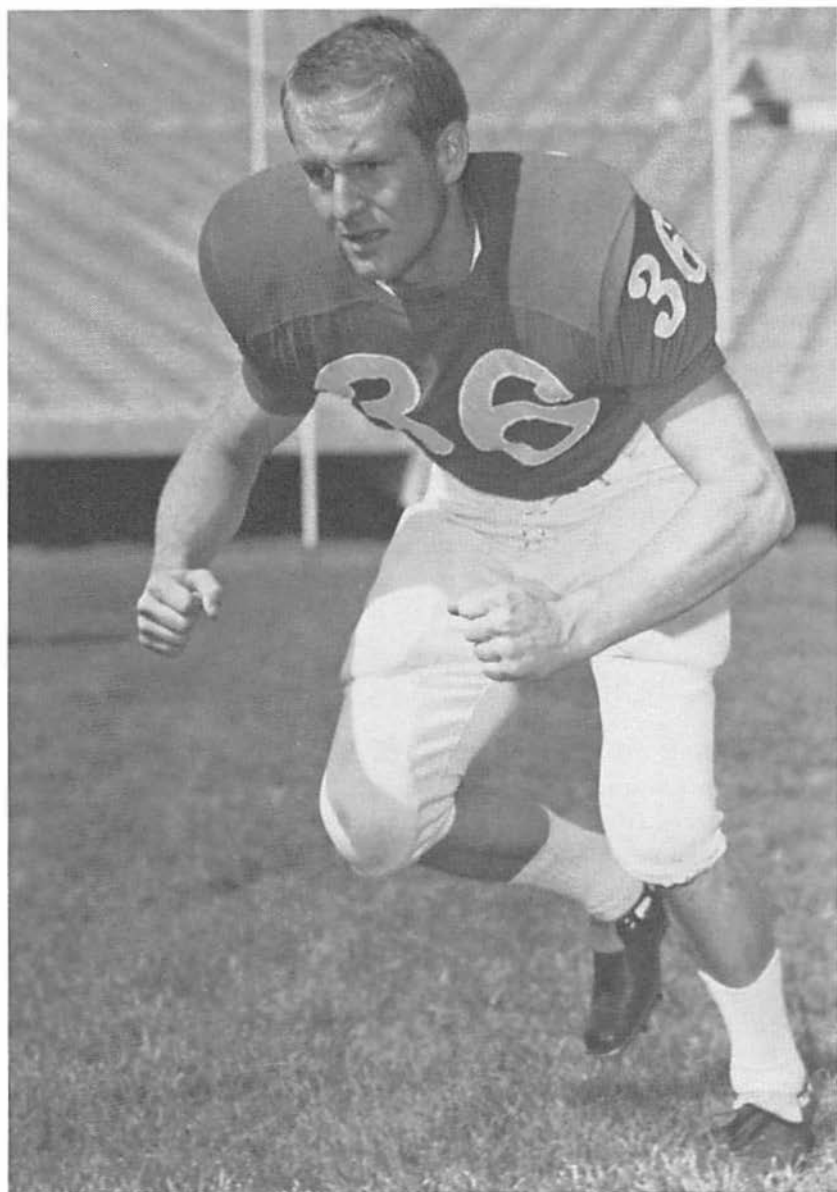
On his first true powerhouse teams Devaney had a fullback who looked like the team mascot, dressed up to give the fans a chuckle. Frank Solich weighed 153 pounds and stood five-feet seven. He once had the trainer sew eight pounds of lead weights into his shorts on weigh-in day so that he wouldn't be the smallest and lightest man on the squad. He still missed by a pound to Larry Wachholtz, a hard-hitting mite of a defensive back who despite his size made All-American, that's all, when other coaches didn't bother to give him a look.

Solich scored 104 points from his tailback slot in his senior year at college, but no school was even interested in talking to him about a scholarship. Devaney did. He thought there was at least a chance to use Solich for running back punts and kickoffs, where agility, quickness, and cool-headedness were more important than muscles.

"None of them were willing to give me a chance," Solich said. "And I knew I could do the job." He broke his ankle in the second game of the season, against Minnesota, but returned for the Orange Bowl game against Auburn and brought back a punt 80 yards for an apparent touchdown. One of the officials, though, said his foot had scraped the sideline chalk mark. But at least he showed that he could do the job.

The following spring Devaney, dissatisfied with the job his big backs were doing at fullback, decided to give Solich a try there. "We know he's quick," Devaney said at the time. "And in our system it is the halfbacks who carry the brunt of the blocking assignments. It will call for a few adjustments, but . . ."

In the annual spring intrasquad game Solich did better than just fine. "Next season you're the fullback," Devaney told



Larry Wachholtz, All-American defensive back, 1966

him.

Then there was Woody Cox, the split end, who at five feet, nine inches and 165 pounds, had been told over and over again, by coaches at every level of competition, that he was too small to play football. He was never convinced. Neither was Devaney. Cox developed into one of his leading and most feared receivers.

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Devaney's talents was in the persons of his dual quarterbacks on his greatest teams, Jerry Tagge and Van Brownson. For three years Devaney alternated the two into the most successful quarterbacking cooperative in the country. Vince Gibson, Devaney's coaching rival at Kansas State, whom Devaney beat ten out of eleven tries, stands in absolute awe of the way his rival mastered the delicate situation of living with two first-string quarterbacks and keeping both of them and their teammates happy.

"There isn't a phony bone in Bob Devaney's body," Gibson said, "and that communicates to his players. You don't know how tough coaching is until you've tried something like that (juggling two first-string quarterbacks) and gotten away with it."

So they marched on. Through the 1965 season they piled up win after win, with only archrival Missouri (16-14) giving the Huskers anything that even mildly resembled a struggle. They had an unblemished ten straight, another Big Eight title, and the number 3 spot in the national polls behind Michigan State and Arkansas. They were booked into the Orange Bowl again, this time against the fourth-ranked Crimson Tide of Alabama. It promised to be the best game of the annual New Year's Day bowl binge. It was also a day of upsets.

An unheralded UCLA squad upset the massive Spartans of Michigan State in the Rose Bowl and the Razorbacks fell in the Cotton Bowl. When the Huskers took the field in Miami that night the other two games were already over. They knew a victory could give them the national championship, since the Associated Press had announced that it would take its final poll of the year after the bowl games.

Upset was the order of the day, though.

Nebraska quarterback Bob Churchich tied an Orange Bowl mark by throwing three touchdown passes. His first went to Tony Jeter, covering 33 yards, his second was a 69-yard bomb to Ben Gregory, and his third was a 14-yard toss to Jeter again. He threw to Freeman White at the one and took it over himself for the Huskers' fourth score.

As dazzling as that performance may appear to have been, it was overwhelmed, totally obliterated, by the lighter, speedier "little ole skinny things," as Coach Paul (Bear) Bryant called his Crimson Tide. Alabama struck first, but the Huskers came right back and tied it on Churchich's first TD pass to Jeter. After that it was all Alabama as the Tide rolled to a 24-7 halftime lead behind the passing combination of Steve Sloan to Ray Perkins and the running of Leslie Kelley. They managed to outscore Alabama in the second half, but fell by a final score of 39 to 28.

By beating the Huskers, Alabama, with an 8-1-1 record going into the game, convinced enough voters that they should be the national champs.

All the Huskers could do was look to next year, but it was not at all a dismal vision. The team was young, most of them were returning, including Churchich and Larry Wachholtz. They were losing three All-Americans, tackle Walt Barnes and ends Jeter and White, but the returning horses up front included tackle Bob Pickens, guard LaVerne Allers, and center Kelly Peterson, and defensive standouts like middle guard Wayne Meylan, linebacker Lynn Senkbeil, and defensive tackle Caryl Stith. Harry Wilson, the strong running tailback, was also returning.

Disappointment did not long haunt the Huskers. They marched through nine straight foes, from Texas Christian through Oklahoma State, had the Big Eight title wrapped up for the fourth consecutive year, and went into the final game against Oklahoma challenging for the top spot in the collegiate polls.

Once again, though, for the second time in three years,



1966 Orange Bowl — Nebraska fullback Frank Solich picks up yardage against Alabama.

the Sooners spoiled their perfect season. In a great battle of defenses Oklahoma edged the Huskers 10 to 9 and dropped them to seventh place in national ranking. Any vindication they might have would have to come in the Sugar Bowl, where, for the second straight year, they found the Crimsom Tide of Alabama, the number three-rated team in the land, waiting for them.

Vindication was postponed, however, as once again the Tide rolled. This time it wasn't much of a contest, to the chagrin of Devaney and the growing legions of Husker fans. Bear Bryant had the upper hand all the way. This time it wasn't Steve Sloan, it was a left-hander by the name of Kenny Stabler. The "Snake" shredded the Huskers' pass defense for close to 300 yards, exploded to a 24-0 halftime lead, and coasted in with a final score of 34-7.

The domination wasn't quite as bad as the score indicated, but the Huskers were simply unable to convert the big play, the third and short yardage situations that keep the drives alive and take the heart out of the opposing defense.



Walt Barnes, All-American tackle, 1965



Tony Jeter, All-American end, 1965

For Devaney it was a tough defeat in that it marked the end of one small era in his building job. Most of the boys who had powered the school to a new domination of the Big Eight and established the Huskers as national powers were graduating. The rebuilding would have to begin again. It also marked the beginning of the low spot in Devaney's fortunes at Nebraska.

No defeat is entirely a defeat if there is something to be



Freeman White, All-American end, 1965

learned from it, some knowledge to be gained. After two straight whippings at the hands of Alabama, Devaney was now in a position where he could sit back and take stock as to the reasons for those losses and take some measures to prevent any reoccurrence. One of the things he learned in the Orange and Sugar Bowls was that overpowering size wasn't enough against a lighter, but faster, hard-hitting team. That small but swarming Alabama defense helped refine his ideas as to the kind of

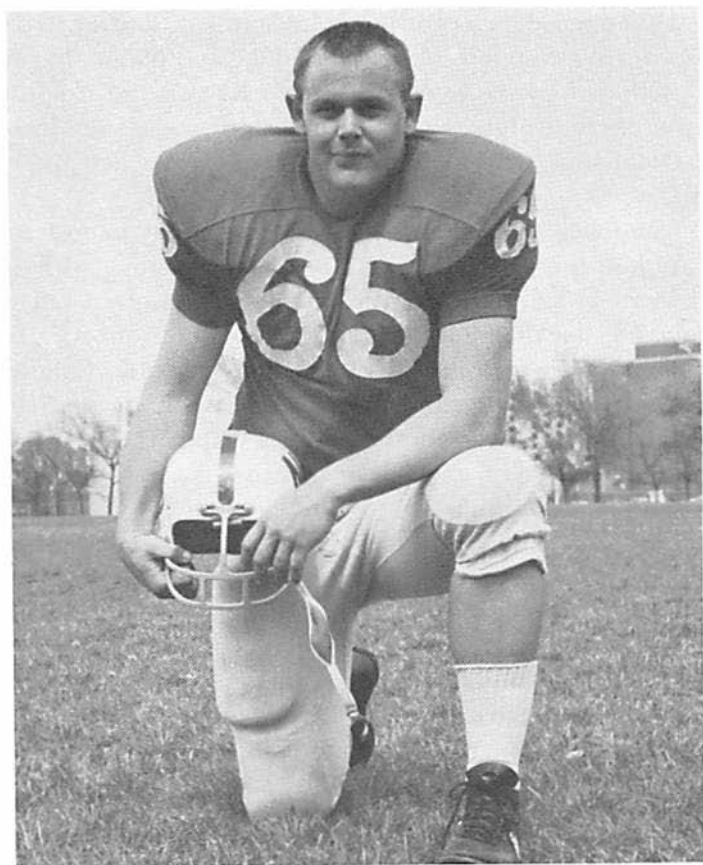


Wayne Meylan, All-American middle guard, 1966, 1967

players he would want to recruit for Nebraska.

To know it, though, is not necessarily to do it. At least not immediately. For the next two seasons, by Devaney standards — and Devaney standards were what the fans and players had come to expect — the Huskers fell on hard times.

There were some standout individual players during those two lean years. Meylan and guard Joe Armstrong were selected on the All-American teams, and end Dennis Richnafsky, full-



Joe Armstrong, All-American guard, 1968

back Dick Davis, defensive tackle Jim McCord, linebacker Ken Geddes, and defensive back Dana Stephenson made All-Big Eight but there were glaring holes at other positions. They had trouble moving the ball and scoring. Where they had scored an average of almost 35 points in 1965, now they were back down to scoring an average of 12.7 a game in 1967, with slight improvement to 15.5 the following year. Hardly the potency of a juggernaut.

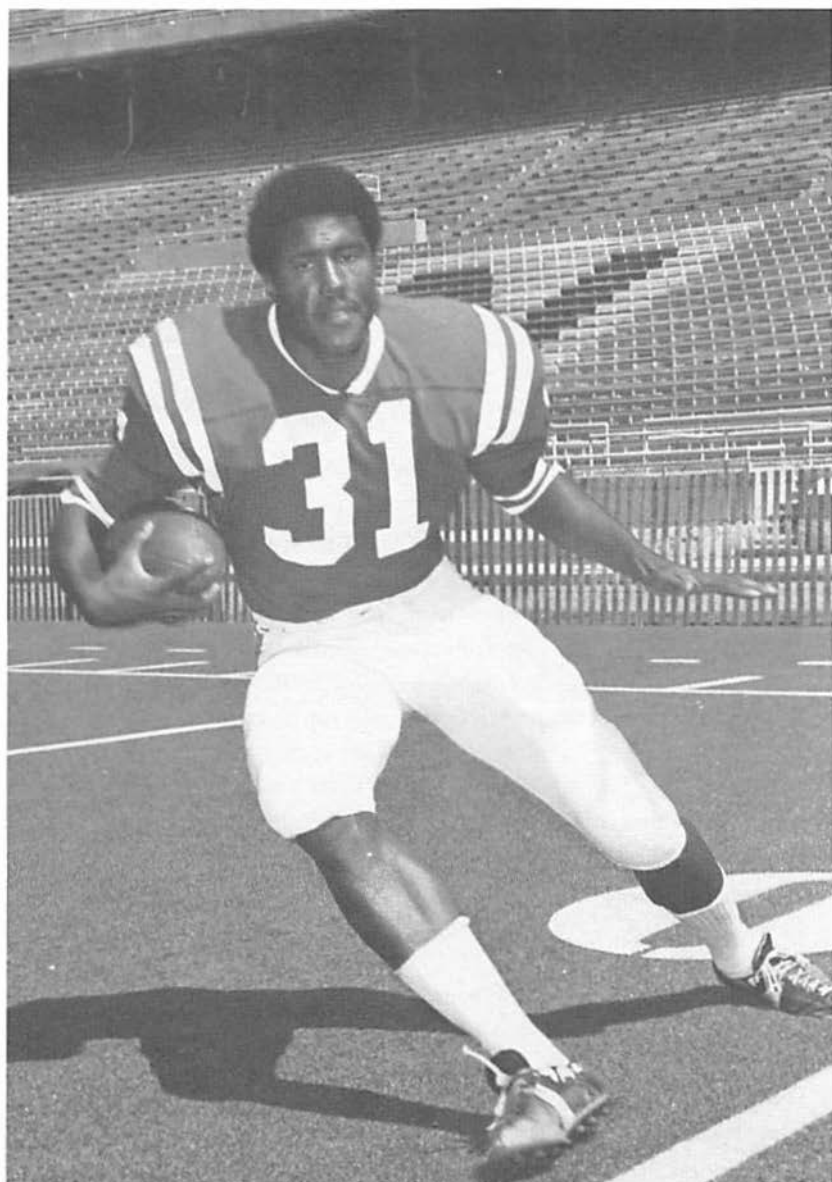
1967 opened on a continuing high note with three straight wins, over Washington, Minnesota, and Kansas State, but they were followed by consecutive losses to Kansas and Colorado, another three straight wins, but then closing losses to Missouri and Oklahoma. There are no bowl invitations when you're 6 and 4.

The following season, 1968, was practically an exact duplication of the previous year. They opened strong with wins over Devaney's old school, Wyoming, followed by Utah and Minnesota, but then fell to Kansas and Missouri on successive Saturdays. They squeaked by Oklahoma State and Colorado, but lost to Kansas State for Vince Gibson's only career win over Devaney, but then got bombed out by Oklahoma in the season's final. Another 6 and 4 year, and they got to watch all the bowl games on the tube.

Light was shining through the end of the tunnel, though. Devaney had been busy recruiting the kind of players he wanted and for the next season he would have the kind of quarterback who could move the ball and get it across the final white line. He had, in fact, not just one quarterback who could beat you passing or running; he had him twice in Jerry Tagge and Van Brownson. He had some running backs coming up who went by the names of Joe Orduna and Jeff Kinney. He had a will-o'-the-wisp young man named Johnny Rodgers. Bob Newton knew how to put a defender on his back, flat on his back, and to stop the other guys he had such quick, mean, defenders as Larry Jacobson, Willie Harper, Bob Terrio, and Rich Glover.

He had, in fact, the makings of a dynasty, the building of another team that would leave a record almost unmatched in college football.

Devaney had recruited aggressively. It didn't go unnoticed, either. When Devaney arrived from Wyoming, even before the Booster Club had bought him a \$200,000 life insurance policy, in one of his throwaway quips he said, "I don't expect to win enough games to be put on NCAA probation. I



Joe Orduna, Nebraska running back

just want to win enough to warrant an investigation."

He got his wish, even if he didn't mean it jocularly. There was a mild flap when the NCAA reprimanded and censured the athletic department for paying for a student-athlete's car repairs. But it was a welcome investigation that in effect gave the athletic department, which Devaney had taken over when he had assumed the position of athletic director following the 1967 season, a very high grade. It was welcomed, because in some circles there had been whispers concerning possible recruiting violations and now after a complete and thorough NCAA investigation those rumors could do nothing but waft away across the wide open spaces of the prairie. Nebraska was clean.

The dynasty looked like anything but a dynasty, however, when in the season opener of 1969 the always powerful Southern California Trojans of Coach John McKay outscored the Huskers 31-21, and following a shutout victory over Texas A & M and an easy win over Minnesota, the Huskers fell to Big Eight rival Missouri. Devaney chalked off that limping conference start to mistakes caused by inexperience and the tough schedule. "Everyone predicts the Big Eight champion will lose one game. We just lost ours," Devaney said prophetically following the loss to Missouri. But with experience his young players leveled off and that tough opening schedule taught them that they had the talent to beat any team in America. That kind of confidence began to express itself and once again to exert the influence of Nebraska power over intercollegiate football.

Kansas, Oklahoma State, and Colorado fell in succession. Then it was Iowa State and Kansas State in turn, and finally they exploded against always thorny Oklahoma, 44 to 14, for their most awesome offensive display of the season. Now they were back up among the leaders, ranked eleventh nationally in most polls, and now there was a bowl bid again.

Again the Bob Devaney sense of humor showed through, poking a little fun at himself. Near the top again, he recalled

how Bear Bryant, after winning the first meeting in Miami, called the next year and said, "Let's get together and have some more fun, Bob," and how Bob agreed to a rematch in the Sugar Bowl and Alabama won again, even bigger than the first time.

Now, Devaney said, the Bear had been on the phone to him again, suggesting that they get together and have some more fun.

"I said, 'Which bowl did you have in mind, Bear?' and he said, 'Well, we were thinking about the Liberty Bowl.' I said, 'Gee, sounds great.' The next day we signed to go to the Sun Bowl."

El Paso it was, and just before the team took the field against Georgia, as they were ready to leave the locker room, Devaney turned and in his most dramatic voice addressed the team: "Boys, half the state of Nebraska is out there cheering for you. And the other half is back home praying for you. Let's go get them."

And then, as the players, with fire in their eyes, stormed onto the field, he muttered half to himself, just to get things in their proper perspective, "And there are two billion Red Chinese who don't give a damn."

Rout in this case is hardly an adequate word for what the Huskers did to the Georgia Bulldogs. Paul Rogers set a record with four field goals, the longest of 50 yards, and none under 32 yards. Van Brownson was 11 of 18 passing, threw for one touchdown and ran for another, and all the young Black Shirts had themselves a fine old time and showed that all that prime beef wasn't going to waste. The final was 45-6 with the Georgia touchdown, a consolation affair, coming at the tail end of the game.

Devaney could feel it coming on. Coaches certainly know when they have the components of greatness and with his young team maturing, and even bowl-tested now, the Huskers entered the season of 1970 with a record of seven straight wins and a taste for more—many, many more.



The defense was back virtually intact, and the offense was beginning to find within itself those explosive qualities that make for championships. In the last two games of the previous season, they had come alive with about 45 points a game, and throughout the entire 1970 season they were a whirlwind off the plains. Their lowest score all season was 21 points, against powerful Southern California in a tie, and against Missouri in a Husker victory. But there were also scores like 65 points against Oklahoma State, 54 against Iowa State, 51 against Kansas State.

Their record had but one blemish, that tie with the Southern Cal Trojans, the second game of the season. That tie dropped them to the number 3 spot in the national rankings behind unbeaten Texas and unbeaten Ohio State. There was a bowl bid and now it was back to Miami and the Oranges.

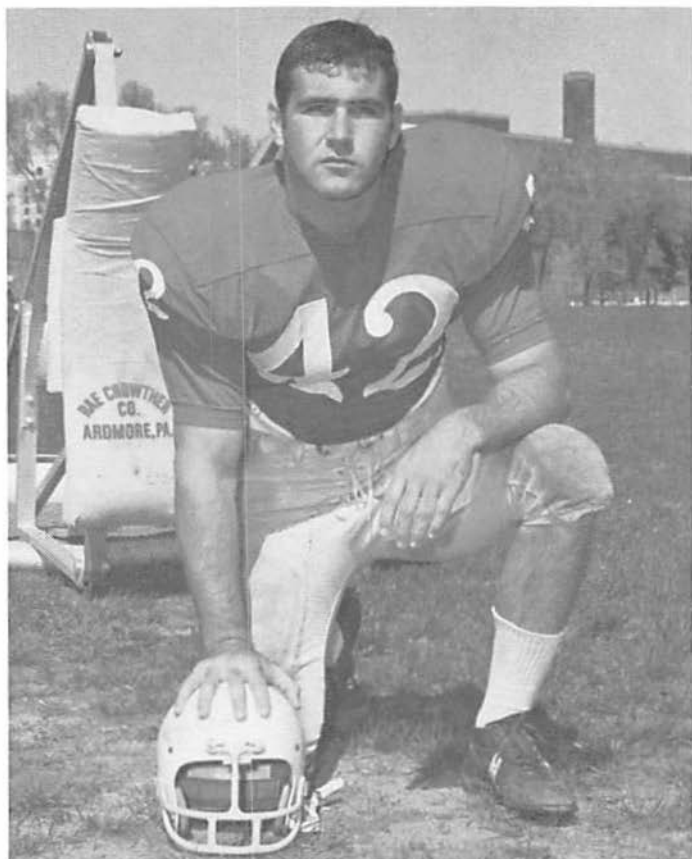
By the time they were ready to take the field against Louisiana State that New Year's evening, the other bowl games were history. It was a repeat of five years before. Notre Dame beat Texas in the Cotton Bowl and Stanford upset Ohio State in the Rose Bowl. Devaney and his players knew that the national championship was within their grasp with a convincing win over the LSU Tigers.

Convincing wins are not easy to come by over Charlie McClendon's teams, though. They play tough defense. They play big defense. They play hard defense.

The fans knew it, too, as 80,699, the third largest crowd in Husker history, jammed into the Orange Bowl to watch the possible makings of a national champion—or a great and memorable upset.

It was both, or as close to both as you can come in one game. The Huskers got a big break early when they picked up a fumble at their own 44. Tagge came out throwing. He hit for

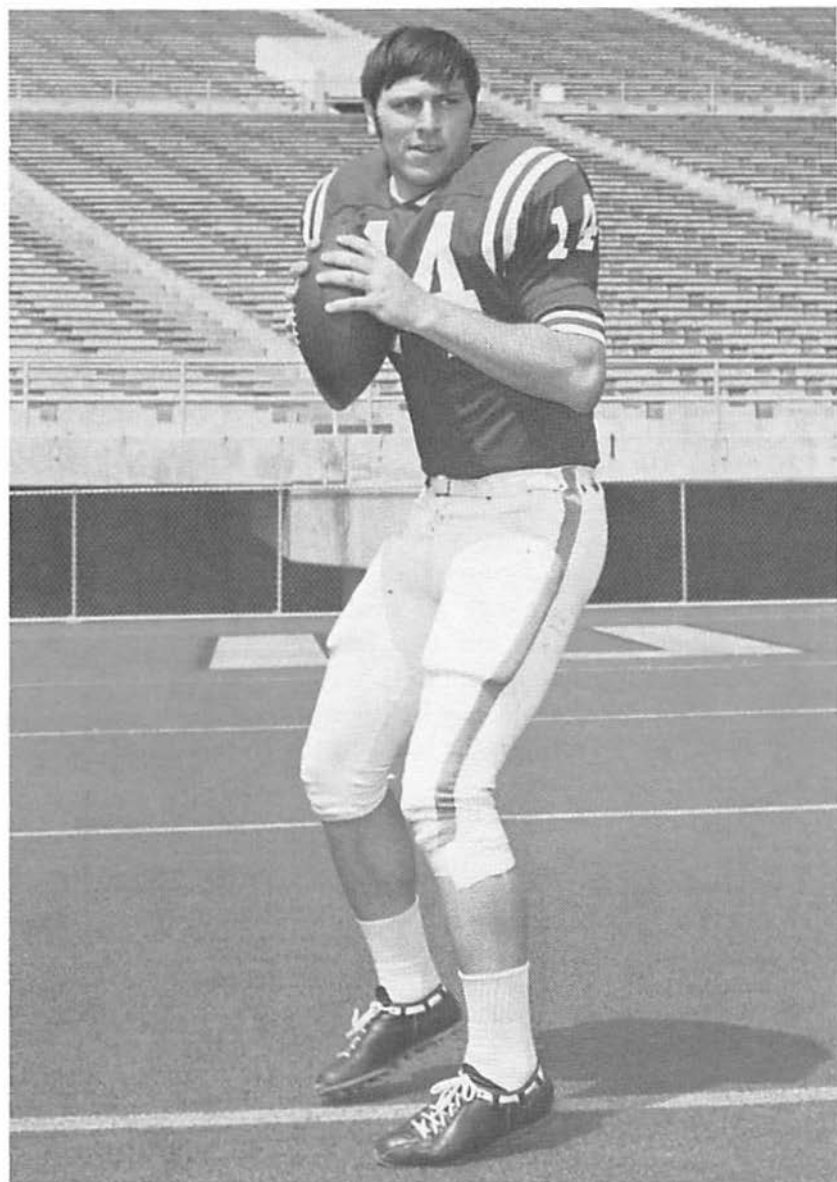
1969 Sun Bowl — Coach Devaney accepts Sun Bowl trophy from E. W. Kayser, Jr., president of the El Paso Sun Carnival. Player framed by trophy is Paul Rogers, who kicked four field goals in the first quarter and was named the game's outstanding offensive player.



Jerry Murtaugh, All-American linebacker, 1970

9, 17, and 14, but when the drive stalled at the 10-yard line, Paul Rogers stroked through a 3-pointer. Just seconds later another break came the Huskers' way when LSU quarterback Buddy Lee bobbled the ball away and Willie Harper pounced on it. On the first play Joe Orduna slashed through for 12 yards down to the 3 and carried it over on the next play to give Nebraska a 10-point lead.

The two teams tore at each other for the rest of the half.



Jerry Tagge, All-American quarterback, 1971

190 THE CORNHUSKERS

The Black Shirts were awesome, led by Harper, who himself blocked a pass, rushed the LSU punter so hard that he forced a 4-yard punt, recovered the fumble to set up the first touchdown, and made four tackles for 46 yards in losses. As a team the defense dumped LSU runners 14 times for 115 yards in losses.

LSU didn't stay down, though. A 36-yard field goal nibbled at the lead just before the half, as did another in the third quarter, this one a 25-yarder that narrowed the lead to 4 points. The Tigers were living up to their defensive reputation, but late in the third quarter they really got some offense going. From their own 25-yard line they took it all the way, with the touchdown coming on a 31-yard pass from Buddy Lee to a stumbling Al Coffee on the final play of the third quarter to put LSU in front 12-10.

Stung and aroused now, the Huskers showed their championship mettle. Tagge ignited the drive with a 16-yard keeper. He kept the drive alive with a 6-yarder to Don Schneiss, nine yards to Johnny Rodgers, and 17 to Jeff Kinney. A clutch catch by Kinney put the ball on the LSU five, and three plays later, Tagge, belted hard at the one by the stubborn Tiger defense, stretched his arms to push the ball into the end zone with 8:50 remaining in the game.

That was it, 17-12, as Bob Terrio made an interception in the dying minutes to kill off any LSU hopes for a miracle.

The Nebraska squad joyfully ran off the field and into the dressing room holding their fingers in the air to signify to fans all across the country that they were "Number 1."

Most agreed, except for a strong pocket of resistance from the Midwest, mainly centered around South Bend, Indiana. Ara Parseghian, whose team had beaten the number-1 Texas Longhorns, felt that his golden domers rated the top spot on the basis of what he called "accepting the greater challenge."

Devaney said that Notre Dame should get some strong support for the top five, but not number 1: "I don't see how the Pope could vote Notre Dame number one," he said.

With the final AP vote several days off, what followed was wrangling and politicking in the public print by the two men. It did neither any real credit, but it was inevitable, and both could defend their actions and words by saying that what they said was said on behalf of their players.

Charlie McClendon, whose team had lost a 3-0 game at Notre Dame, expressed no doubt that Nebraska was the superior team and bestowed the laurel himself with a sigh, when he said, "You don't make mistakes and win against the number 1 team in the nation. You could say they sort of engulfed us."

Parseghian wasn't buying that opinion, though. "The automatic assumption that they should be number 1 disturbs me," he said. "Our team should get a great deal of credit for accepting the challenge of playing the top-ranked team."

He made the veiled suggestion that Nebraska could have played Texas, but that the Huskers ducked out of the game with the Longhorns to go after easier picking.

"We also had an invitation to the Orange Bowl," Parseghian said, "but we knew we couldn't be number 1 by going there. Someone else would have had to beat Texas."

Devaney said he didn't know who it was who invited Nebraska to the Cotton Bowl, but whoever it was, they didn't get the message to him.

"I called Parseghian to try and find out where they were going to play, but he couldn't tell me," Devaney said. "He didn't know at the time. We couldn't monkey around for a week having the kids thinking about bowl games, so we decided on the Orange Bowl."

Devaney also pointed out that the only blemish on his Huskers' record was the 21-21 tie with Southern Cal. And it was those same Trojans that had knocked over the Irish 38-28.

"Parseghian is overlooking the two most important facts. We did better against our two common opponents, LSU and Southern Cal, and we are undefeated. They are not. It's as simple as that. He's full of malarkey to make statements like that. Notre Dame was only able to score a field goal against

LSU on their own field. And I don't think Notre Dame would like to have another go-round with LSU."

Before the smoke cleared, Parseghian objected to the remark about the Pope as being in bad taste and said that Notre Dame should also be given credit "for the fact that we accepted a less attractive holiday atmosphere to meet the top-ranked team and we met the challenge."

The arguments were silenced for good, though, when the final AP poll came out and the Huskers were a landslide choice as the top team in the land. Anything after that was just so much wind.

There come times in men's lives that are ripe for pause, and certainly the attainment of a long-cherished goal is one of those times. To sit alone in the rarefied atmosphere of the top position in your profession gives a man impetus for reflection, to take stock of his life and accomplishments and ponder, if only briefly, his future course.

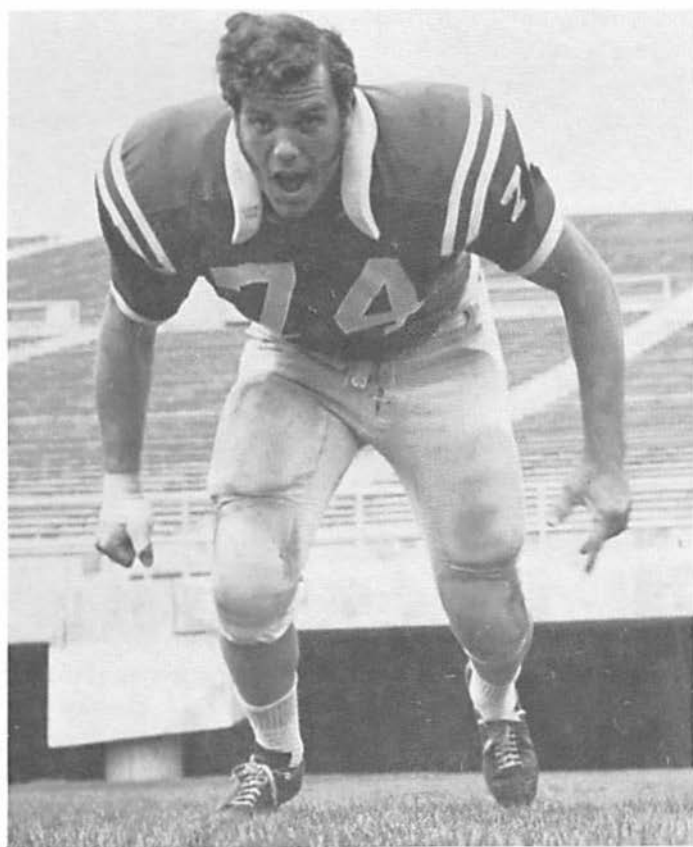
For a football coach, though, there is no time for such inward stock-taking. The next year has already begun before this year has been completed. But there was a thought growing in the mind of Bob Devaney, a thought that perhaps it was time for a move.

Hardly, though, before the euphoria of being the champions had fully settled in on giddy Lincoln, it was time to defend that championship. It was simply that. Maintain it or be has-beens.

Devaney lost a couple of All-Americans in linebacker Jerry Murtaugh and tackle Bob Newton, but virtually all the rest were back. It was to be his capstone year.

They walked, ran, trampled over ten straight opponents, never scoring less than 31 points, and that low total only once, against powerful Colorado; shut out three foes and gave up more than one touchdown to only two others. Then it was Oklahoma in what has been called the "Game of the Decade," the "Game of the Century," the "Greatest Game Ever Played."

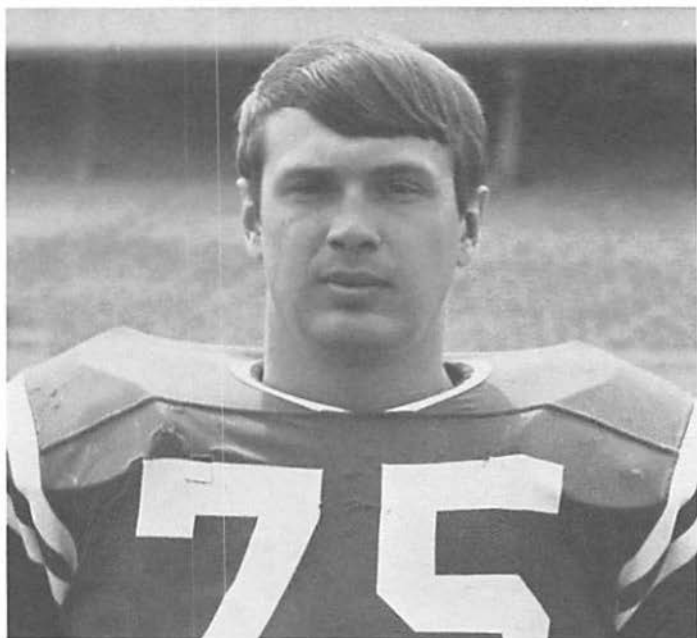
It was the same for the players, only it looks different



Bob Newton, All-American tackle, 1970

when seen through their eyes and experienced through their minds. Jeff Kinney, who rushed for 171 yards and scored four touchdowns, including the winner with only 1:38 left, said that it was the biggest moment in his life.

"Not everybody gets to play in a game like that," he said. "People around here idolize football players. They'll remember that game. The whole thing was wild, like being in a different world. The game itself was unbelievable — 35-31. When the plane bringing us home landed in Lincoln, they couldn't get it



Larry Jacobson, All-American tackle and Outland Trophy winner, 1971

anywhere close to the terminal because of all the people, ten thousand of them, yelling and screaming."

There was a nightmarish moment for Kinney when the ball came loose down near the Oklahoma goal line on that final drive. It was blown dead, but the Oklahoma players protested vociferously. Moments later he banged it across.

It took Kinney a long time to recover from that game. His nerves were a mess. He was unable to sleep. He hyperventilated. Lying in bed at night, wide awake, he would feel as if he were having a heart attack. His fingers tingled. Doctors told him not to take deep breaths, drink beer, or take a hot bath. He became a hypochondriac.

But there was no doubt who was the best team in the nation when the Huskers returned to the Orange Bowl once again to meet Bear Bryant's Alabama team. In what was

supposed to be another "Game of the Century," since the Crimson Tide were the number-2-ranked team.

Sartorially, at least, the Bear had it all over Devaney. He and Devaney would show up at the same press conference and the Bear would be impeccable in sports coat and contrasting slacks, wearing one of his trademark plaid hats. And there would be the rumpled Devaney, in red Nebraska coach's shirt, pants that looked like Rich Glover had been scrimmaging in them, black shoes and white sweat socks, still hot from practice.

The Bear was urbane and sophisticated and passed out miniatures of his famous plaid hat to all the sportswriters, and even got in a plug for a marketing venture he was going to try — "The Bear's Hats."

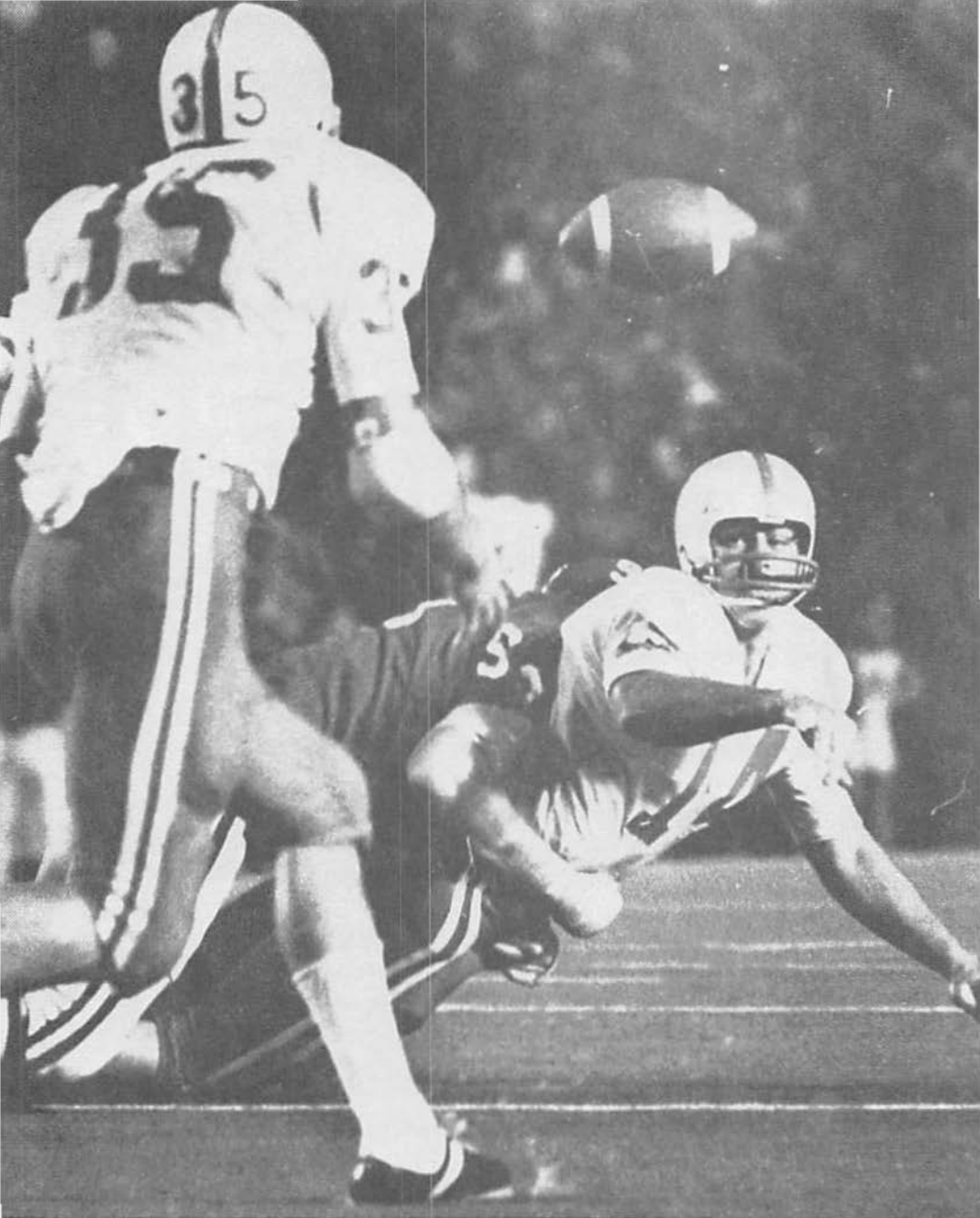
Devaney just "aw-shucksed" Bryant like a poor country cousin and heaped praise on Alabama as the greatest team his poor little ole farm boys would ever be privileged to be stomped on by. For a while he laid it on so thick, there was some feeling that he might kiss the Bear's hand and on bended knee ask him for a manager's job, anything menial.

But it was hard to disguise what was really in his heart.

Revenge. He had had his second chance and been soundly thrashed. Now it was his third chance. He was not about to strike out.

"This is one of the greatest teams ever to play football," said a subdued Bear Bryant in the deathly hush of the Alabama locker room after his team had just been crushed 38 to 6 by Nebraska. "I surely think they're one of the greatest, if not the greatest team, I've ever seen." It was Bryant's worst defeat ever at Alabama.

"We were beaten soundly by a far superior team," he said. "I felt I had a poor game plan. We made a lot of mistakes, but you have to say Nebraska forced us into most of them. I wouldn't have minded our bunch playing lousy if we could have lucked out and won. But they just toyed with us, and our kids didn't come down here to be humiliated. They gave it the best shot they had."



1972 Orange Bowl — Stopped by an Alabama defender, Nebraska quarterback Jerry Tagge laterals to running back Jeff Kinney, who ran for extra yardage on the play.



Rich Glover, All-American middle guard, 1971, 1972; Outland Trophy winner, 1972

Devaney and Nebraska were now unbeaten in thirty-two straight games. And the win over the Bear made him feel especially good. "We tried not to impress on the players the importance that I felt about this game. I've lost twice to Bear and I don't like to think that there's a guy around who can just walk out on the field and beat me any time he wants to—even if his team is very good."

Very good would never be good enough to beat that Devaney team. "I guess we hit a little tougher and a little too quick," said Rich Glover after the slaughter. "As far as I'm

concerned the pressure was off after we beat Oklahoma."

The pressure was really off after Johnny Rodgers, repeating his Thanksgiving Day feat against Oklahoma, returned that punt 77 yards in the first quarter following a drive and TD plunge by Kinney. That was the dam-breaker.

"It started slowly but then opened up and all I could see between me and the goal was that green carpet," said Rodgers. All the Alabamians were flat on their backs, that's why. It was a wipe-out down the sidelines.

After that it was just a matter of how many points the Huskers wanted to score.

Tackle Larry Jacobson had the answer even before the game. "Come Saturday night," he said, "there won't be anything to discuss. We'll still be number 1 and Oklahoma will be back to number 2."

That's the way it worked out, and Colorado finished number 3 to give the Big Eight a sweep of the top three spots nationally. And the Nebraska Cornhuskers ruled the conference and the world of intercollegiate football.

Two weeks after his greatest triumph Bob Devaney dropped his biggest bombshell. He said he was seriously thinking of quitting. Some said that he was hurt because the American Football Coaches Association had picked Bryant over him as Coach of the Year. They said he was bitter because, of all the honors and awards that had come his way, he had never been able to win the award given by his own professional associates.

"I don't coach because I want to be Coach of the Year or because I think I should be. I've been thinking about it after each of the last three seasons. It's a kind of challenge. One minute you want to quit and the next minute you want to win three national championships in a row, which has never been done before and is almost impossible."

There was no medical problem, just a question of moving on, he said. "It's a lot better, I guess, to step out when you're at the top than when you're losing. At least nobody's nudging me now. I'm 56 years old and I've been coaching a long time. A lot

of fellows younger than I am are falling out with heart attacks, and there aren't many older guys still exposing themselves to the strain of being a head coach."

Devaney said that he would go home and think it over for a couple of weeks, that nothing was set in his mind as yet.

Still it was a shock when a couple of weeks later the university board of regents approved the appointment of Thomas W. Osborne, one of Devaney's assistants, as head football coach, effective Jan. 2, 1973. That was it. Bob Devaney would take his shot at the impossible three national championships in a row and then retire to the university's athletic directorship.

Really, though, it was all over the minute he said it. Although graduation lost him three All-Americans in Kinney, Tagge, and Jacobson, there was still enough talent to carry on. But the son of a football legend, following a script a screen writer might have produced, ran and passed UCLA, the basketball school, to a stunning upset over the defending two-time national champions. Mark Harmon was his name, the son of old 98, Tom Harmon of Michigan fame, making his college debut, and all he did was pass for one TD, run for another, and do both to set up the winning field goal with only twenty-two seconds to play and snap the longest undefeated string in college football at thirty-two games.

The quest for the impossible three came to an end almost before it started, but the season did not degenerate into playing out the schedule. Just the opposite. In fact, as if to make amends, the Huskers unleashed one of the most powerful, devastating machines seen on a college gridiron. The Black Shirts registered four shutouts in a row during one stretch while the offense was rolling to such scores as 77 points against West Point, 49 over Minnesota, 62 against Missouri, 56 against Kansas, and 59 against Kansas State.

Still, though, it was a season of the inexplicable. They were tied 23-23 by Iowa State and in the final game of the year lost 17 to 14 to their old nemesis, Oklahoma. The game was



billed as the battle for the Heisman Trophy between Rodgers and the Sooners' great running back, Greg Pruitt. But it didn't live up to its billing. Pruitt was hampered by an ankle sprain and carried the ball only twice. Rodgers' total offense, handling the ball nine times, was 53 yards.

For consolation there was the team's fourth straight Big Eight championship and another bowl bid. And the Huskers earned the distinction of being the only school ever to sweep college football's individual honors when Rodgers was awarded the Heisman, and Rich Glover, the two-time All-American, was awarded the Outland Trophy as the nation's outstanding interior lineman. It was also the first time a school had ever won back-to-back Outland Trophies, with Larry Jacobson the recipient the year previous. And there was another trip to the Orange Bowl. The opponent would be Notre Dame.

Devaney would not only get the chance to go out a winner, but there also may have been something personal dating back to his exchange of words with Ara Parseghian over who was number 1 a couple of years back.

Devaney and Notre Dame's athletic director, Edward "Moose" Krause, had engaged in a little verbal set-to over the use of redshirting by Nebraska, the practice of stretching out a player's collegiate eligibility over five years instead of four.

Krause accused Devaney of loading his roster with 20 to 30 redshirts, and said he thought boys went to school primarily for an education, not to play football.

Devaney countered by saying that Krause was shooting his mouth off without knowing the facts. He said that many boys come to Nebraska with only the background of eight-man football played in the sparsely settled towns of the Great Plains, and need an extra year. He said the increased demands of modern curricula also put added pressure on a boy, especially if he is engaged in other school activities.

Going into the Notre Dame game, Devaney admitted that

Devaney and Rodgers at the beginning of the 1972 season



Johnny Rodgers accepts Heisman Trophy for outstanding college football player in 1972.

the prospect of ending his active coaching career saddened him. He said his own impending retirement, and Rodgers' troubles with the Heisman voters, trying to convince them that his brushes with the law should not disqualify him, might have made his Huskers a team laboring under too heavy a strain.



1973 Orange Bowl — Johnny Rodgers, Heisman Trophy winner, goes over the line against Notre Dame.

"After our loss to UCLA, I faced up to the fact that we could still be number 1 again if we didn't lose another game. But I knew if we lost we were out of business. So I think this put more of a strain on me and the team.

"Sure, I've thought to myself many times, 'Why didn't I



1973 Orange Bowl — Nebraska players lift Devaney onto their shoulders after defeat of Notre Dame, 40-6.

quit when I was national champion?' But we had a shot at three straight national titles this year and we had a good football team. We had a chance to be as good as anybody and I think we've shown that ability on given days. But we just haven't got the job done consistently."

It may be said in all honesty, and without any sense of exaggeration, that they were consistent against Notre Dame. And, if Rodgers had some detractors for the Heisman going into that game, he had none afterwards. Seldom are an indi-

vidual and a team so brilliant that they simply humiliate a first-class opponent, as Nebraska and Rodgers did to the Irish that night.

Little "Johnny R" merely scored four times himself and passed for a fifth touchdown in the 40-to-6 rout in Miami. As a bit of a surprise Devaney moved his game-breaker into the deep back slot from his usual flanker position. On the first play from scrimmage, he took a pitch and went 13 yards. A sign of things to come. He capped his career with scoring runs of 8, 4, and 5 yards, caught the Irish defense completely flat-footed by faking a sweep and then uncocking a 52-yard TD pass to end Frosty Anderson in the second quarter, and scored the last of his career 50 touchdowns on an electrifying pass and run play from Dave Humm in the third quarter.

Total offense for the Huskers that memorable night was a near incredible 560 yards, and the Black Shirts limited the vaunted Irish attack to slightly over 100 running and the same amount passing.

Thus an era ended, not only for Nebraska football and Bob Devaney, but for all of college football. When he stepped down Bob Devaney left as the winningest active coach in the game with an overall winning percentage of .806. During his years at Nebraska, 1962 through 1972, his teams had a .829 winning rate.

He belongs, certainly, in the pantheon of the greats. His place is subject to argument, but in the only tests he faced, measured against his own contemporaries, he was the best. No man can be better than that.



Tom Osborne, Nebraska coach, 1973

13

Osborne and the Future

In college football, the coach is the superstar. This is because the player is transient, the easily forgotten tool. It is like that everywhere. You say Notre Dame, you mean Rockne and Leahy and Parseghian. You say Ohio State, you mean Woody Hayes. Southern California is John McKay. Alabama, Bear Bryant. The list is endless. It is studded with celebrities, minor and major. But by any terms, Bob Devaney was a major celebrity. In short, a difficult act to follow.

And Tom Osborne is the unlikely man who was hand-picked and groomed by the star himself to follow the act. Osborne is an eminently capable man, a man with the makings of a great coach. But a man utterly unlike Bob Devaney.

Osborne, for one thing, was a great athlete. He grew up in Hastings, Nebraska, and, when he was a senior in high school, was chosen athlete of the year by the Omaha *World-Herald*. From there, he followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and stayed at home to go to Hastings College, where he was a star quarterback. In 1959, he was named college athlete of the year by the *World-Herald*.

After that were three seasons in the National Football League with the Washington Redskins and the San Francisco 49ers as a wide receiver. But football wasn't his in future, he thought. Academic study was. In 1962 he came to Lincoln to pursue higher degrees.

He had no intention of going into coaching, but in that fall of 1962 when he returned to campus life, he asked Devaney for a position as a graduate assistant. Devaney gave him the job. He held onto the position until 1965, when he got his doctorate.

For the next two years, Osborne held a dual appointment. He was an instructor in educational psychology and an assistant football coach. By 1967, that had become too hectic, and Osborne had to opt for one or the other. He chose football, which had always been his first love. He was the offensive coordinator, in charge of receivers.

"My dad was a college football player, and when I was four or five he started me in the back yard," Osborne says. "Then he went in the service for five years, but when he came back, I still had an interest in sports, and he nurtured it. From fourth grade on, I remember playing almost every night until dark. It was like that until I played pro football.

"But when I quit playing, I came back with the idea to get my Master's and my Doctorate and go into college administration. The reason I started coaching was to soften the blow of getting out of athletics, I was fearful I would miss it too much. But that's not the way it turned out."

No, it's not. Coaching has become a full-time business for Tom Osborne. A full-time business at which he excelled. And by the time he was 34, in the fall of 1973, Tom Osborne, gracefully, easily, without paying dues like Devaney, had risen to the very top of the business.

That was the season he became Bob Devaney's successor as the head football coach at the University of Nebraska.

"There are ten, twelve, maybe fifteen real good coaching jobs in the country," Osborne says. "Jobs where there is the

interest in the sport, where the facilities are good, where there is the tradition. Simply, where you should win. This is one of them. So even though I had a very tough act to follow, after the tremendous success of Devaney's tenure, there are excellent tools to work with."

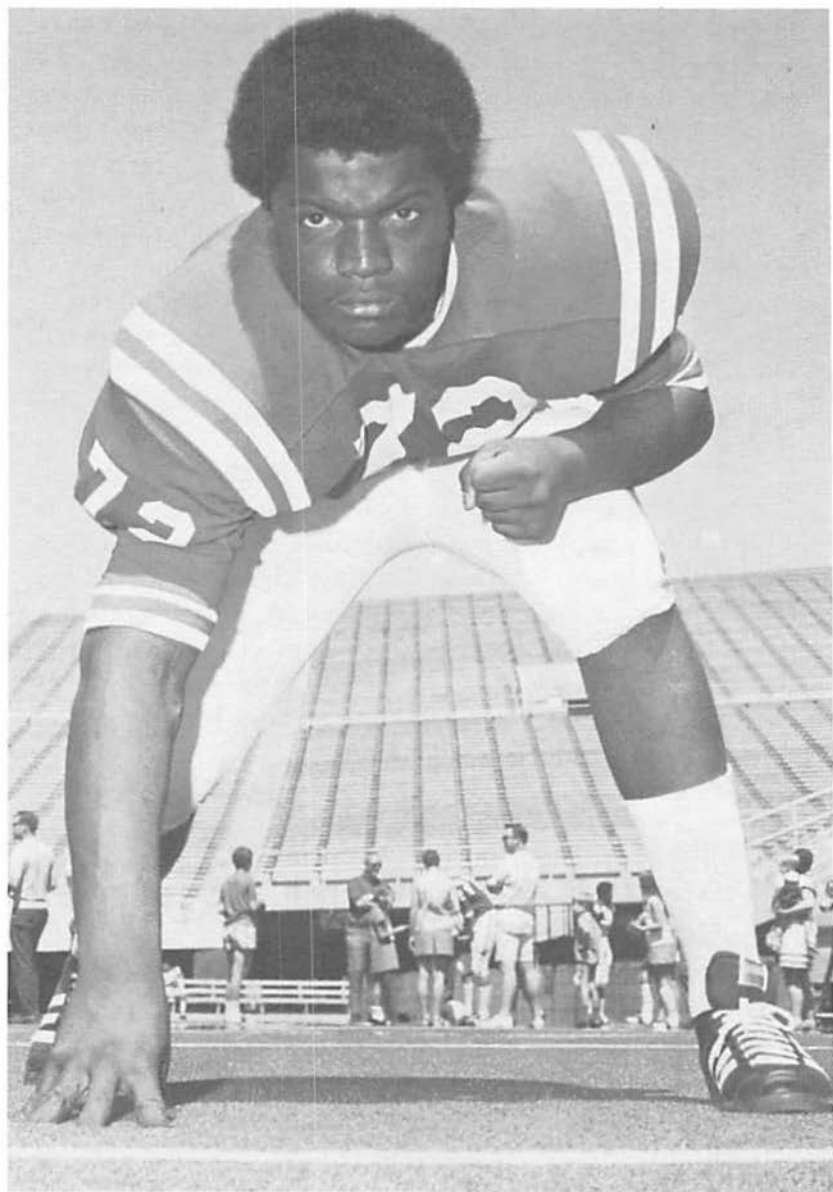
And Osborne is the kind of man who can work with the tools quite well, although his approach admittedly varies from Devaney's.

"Bob was a lot more outgoing than I am. He's a remarkable person," Osborne says. "The schedule he kept was incredible. He was either speaking or traveling somewhere every day of the year he wasn't coaching. For him that came naturally. He was a great recruiter.

"I look at recruiting as a necessary evil. It's part of the job. But I really don't like the extensive travel; I don't like to be away from my family. But still I try to go to the home of every recruit. You know, Nebraska is a little unique in the importance of football. No other major school has no pro football to compete with. There aren't many other diversions. There's no skiing; there's no beaches. So people tend to focus in on Nebraska football. It's fairly natural, I guess. It's always been that way, even when they were losing.

"As a result, I do quite a bit of public speaking. A couple of times a week. And now, more people recognize me when I walk down the street or sit in a restaurant. And to be honest, it's not always that enjoyable. People will come up to me and say, 'Well, only 180 days to the first game; I can't wait.' And I'll always say, 'Well, I can.' I'd rather not be in the public eye. But I like to coach football and work with athletes, and that's the price you have to pay."

The departure of Devaney and his great stars did not give the Huskers pause. The new season was on them and there were new stars to replace the old—Dave Humm, the left-handed quarterback, Daryl White at offensive tackle, John Dutton on defense, Steve Manstedt at defensive end, and Frosty Anderson was back making his circus catches.



Daryl White, All-American tackle, 1972, 1973

They started an era of their own, ripping through their first four opponents and getting all of Huskerland talking national championship again. Revenge came against Harmon and UCLA in the season opener by a score of 40-13; and they smashed two of the Big Ten's representatives, Wisconsin and Minnesota, but the bubble burst against Missouri when a try for the two-point conversion failed with only a minute left in the game and the Huskers went down 13-12. Oklahoma State came on and tied them 17-17, and Oklahoma combined a devastating ground game and a stout defense against Humm's passes to shut them out in the final regular-season game.

On balance it was a representative Nebraska powerhouse. Osborne and his team had an incredibly tough act to follow and they handled the job with distinction. They were runner-up to the Sooners in their own conference, and the national polls, the UPI and the AP, had them in eleventh and seventh place, respectively.

Bowl time came around and the Huskers capped their season against the champion Texas Longhorns of the Southwest Conference in the Cotton Bowl in Dallas. It was another big win for the Huskers in their winning bowl tradition.

After a defense-dominated first half, which saw the teams go to the locker room with three points apiece, the Huskers broke the game open in the third quarter. Bob Thornton returned a missed Texas field goal try 41 yards to set up the score. Wingback Rich Bahe got the final 12 yards on a reverse. Four plays later the Black Shirts ripped the ball loose from the Longhorns at the Texas 19-yard line and three plays later Tony Davis bolted over from the three to put the game out of reach for all practical purposes. Rich Sanger kicked a 43-yard field goal midway through the fourth quarter to wrap up the scoring and make the final: Nebraska 19, Texas 3.

That first season, getting it over, out of the way and done with, may have brought a sigh and smile to Tom Osborne's handsome face. That team may have been Bob Devaney's, and fans and critics may have been judging that team as if it were

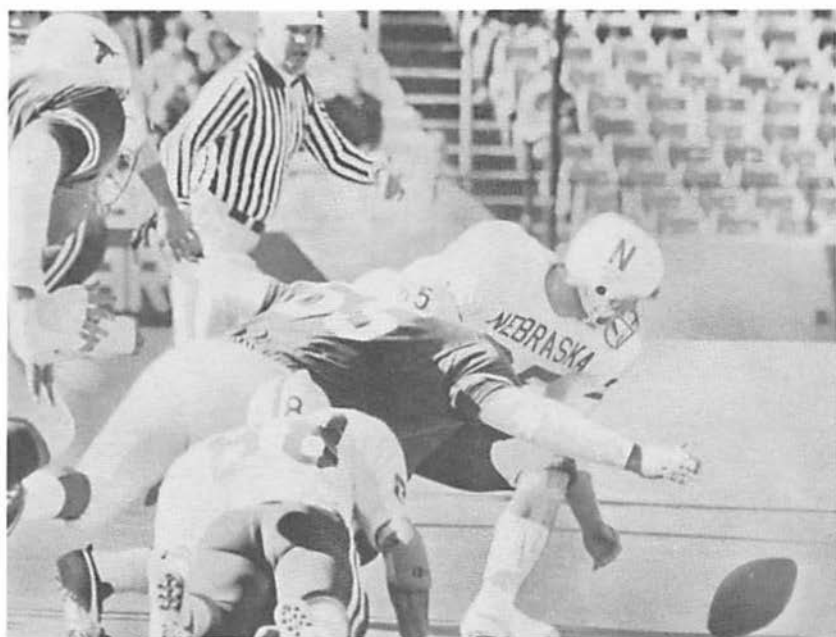


John Dutton, All-American tackle, 1973

still Bob Devaney's, but more and more it would become his, Tom Osborne's Nebraska Cornhuskers. As Devaney's shadow would begin to recede, so his would emerge and grow.

Change was in the air. Players departing, new ones coming in. Now they were Osborne's players and the team would begin to bear his unmistakable stamp. Already there was one apparent difference. His team threw the ball more. Devaney's quarterbacks ran the ball and stuck to a more ball-control-oriented game plan, even though they did operate out of a multiple offense alignment. Sure, there was Dave Humm to point to, an outstanding passer as the reason for the difference. But not all of the difference. Humm was a straight drop-back passer. Get back into the pocket and set up to throw. Jerry Tagge had always looked for running room.

Osborne predicted that Humm would run more in the



1974 Cotton Bowl—Nebraska halfback Tony Davis fumbles. Texas recovered.

coming season. "Dave has found himself as a runner. We're always torn at how much to run your quarterback, but he'll run for us." Maybe he said that to give his opponents something to think about.

The offense, though, wasn't geared anymore for a running quarterback. Osborne made sure of that when he switched his leading ball carrier, Tony Davis, from I-back, where he had gained 1,134 yards as a sophomore, to fullback during the spring drills.

Davis took to the shift with relish. "I don't think he would want to return to I-back," said Osborne. "Tony likes to hit people, and that's what our fullback does," he grinned in some sort of eager anticipation.

Even though his first trial period was now behind him and



Dave Humm, All-American quarterback, 1974

Osborne and his staff were looking forward to a season without the huge weight of Devaney pressing down on them, in some ways the pressure was just as intense. It was the pressure of knowing they had to produce a winner no matter who it was they were being measured against. But that is also the kind of pressure that Tom Osborne enjoys.

"The coaches and players feel strongly that they'll pro-



Tony Davis, Nebraska halfback

duce one of the better teams around. We expect it and we expect our fans to expect it, 'too. I'm sure it got to be habit-forming during Bob Devaney's era. We expected to have a fine team and the fans expected us to have a fine team. That's the kind of feeling we want to keep going every year."

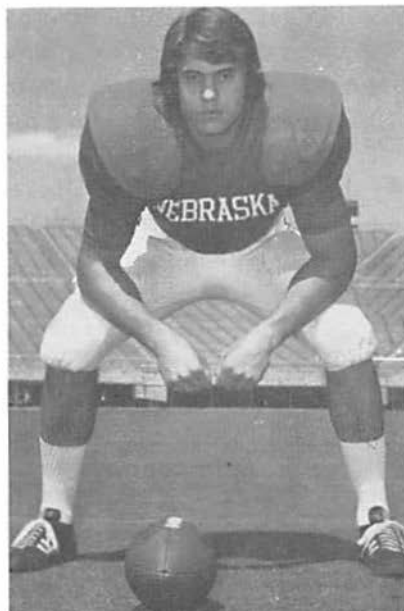
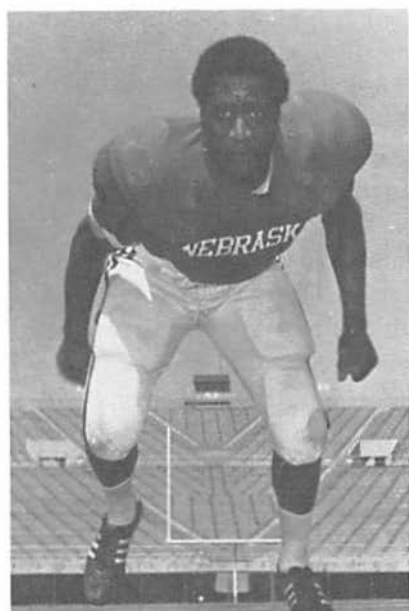
Going in to 1974, though, there were some areas of concern for Osborne. Defense was one, particularly the middle guard, and the middle guard in the Nebraska system is the keystone of the entire defense. There was also a question of depth along the entire defensive line, and there was the problem of finding an adequate backup man for Humm. It didn't seem particularly crucial during the spring, especially with Humm looking like the best quarterback in America, but it would develop into a problem of vast proportions.

On offense many observers felt that the Huskers, up the middle—center, quarterback, and fullback—in Rik Bonness, Humm, and Davis, were the strongest team in the country.

Osborne was looking for consistency, though, rather than flashes of greatness, huge scores against several opponents and then tailing off against others. That is fine for averages, but it's consistency that makes championships, not averages.

Like any good coach Osborne set high goals for his team. "Certainly our goal is to win the Big Eight title. We feel we'll be a contender. The problem is that six or seven other teams will also be contenders. Without question, the Big Eight is the finest, best-balanced, and toughest conference in the United States. All that's certain is that it looks like a darn tough season. There is so little difference between 11-0 or 10-1, and 7-4 or 6-5 in the Big Eight. We will be good, but I don't know whether we'll be the former or the latter."

What it turned out to be, in looking back now, was somewhere in between those two extremes. To paraphrase the novelist, it was at once the best of seasons and the worst of seasons; a year of fumbles, a year of recoveries; a year of good breaks, a year of bad breaks; a year of highs, a year of lows. In short, it was a year of inconsistencies.



Marvin Crenshaw, All-American tackle, 1974 (left); Rik Bonness, All-American center, 1974 (right)

The opener was auspicious enough. They jumped off to a 33-0 halftime lead against Oregon and finished ahead 61-7. "I'm glad they didn't quit with that halftime lead," said Osborne. "Last year we had a tendency to jump on people, then take it easy."

Against Wisconsin the following week it was a complete reversal. Humm had his team ahead, but suffered a hip injury and was forced out of the game. Osborne didn't have a backup man who could do the job and the Huskers went down 21-20.

As if to make amends, they bombed Northwestern 49-7 and Minnesota 54-0, but against Missouri, leading 10-0 with but seven minutes to play, they came completely unraveled. The Tigers scored three times in the last few minutes to cut down the Cornhuskers 21-10 and the clinching scores came on a Husker fumble and interception.

That low was followed by another high as Humm had his greatest day in football against the Kansas Jayhawks when he set three conference records in a 56-0 win by completing 23 of 27 passes, including 15 in a row at one stage, for an 85 percent completion mark, and hit Don Westbrook for three scores.

Luck was with the Huskers against Oklahoma State when cornerback Ardell Johnson fell on a State fumble at the Nebraska goal line in the closing minutes to preserve a 7-3 lead. Johnson had earlier blocked a State field goal try.

For a while it looked as if things had leveled off as the Huskers dispatched Colorado, for the seventh straight time, Iowa State, and Kansas State before going up against their arch rival, the Oklahoma Sooners.

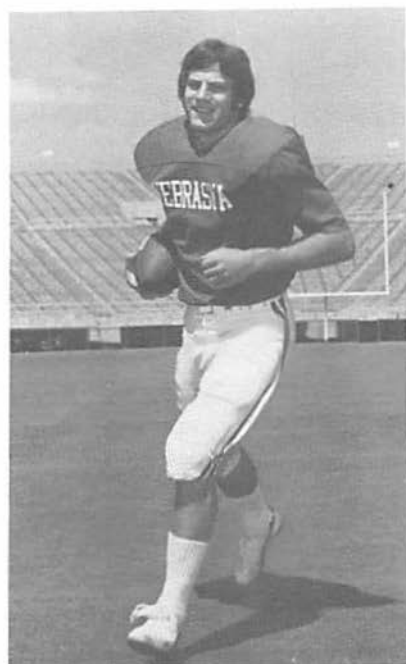
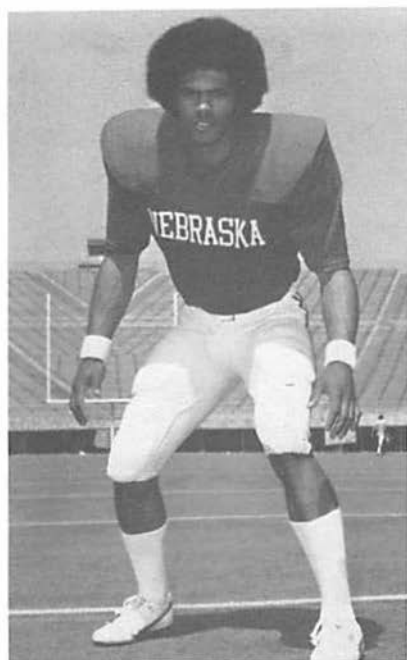
Across the country the Sooners had strong support as the finest team in college football. They were, however, on NCAA probation and barred from post-season bowl games and other honors, including national ranking. More than any, this was the game the Huskers wanted. Halfway through the third quarter they led 14-7 and recovered an Oklahoma fumble at the Sooners' 15-yard line. A touchdown would make them almost unbeatable, but any score would put them in a commanding position.

But the great Sooner defense dug in and held. And, that stand in the shadow of their own goal seemed to awaken and inspire the entire Oklahoma team. They went on to win 28-14.

Osborne pointed to that goal-line stand as the pivotal moment of the game. "We needed to get something there," he said. "The wishbone isn't a come-from-behind offense."

Oklahoma coach Barry Switzer said that the Huskers were the best his team had faced in a stretch that now reached twenty-eight consecutive unbeaten games.

Disappointing, perhaps, but by any yardstick, still it was a good season. The Huskers were rated eighth in the national polls, and they were going into their sixth straight bowl game, the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans on New Year's Eve. The opponent was Florida, trying to match their ball-control offense against the Huskers' more wide-open attack.

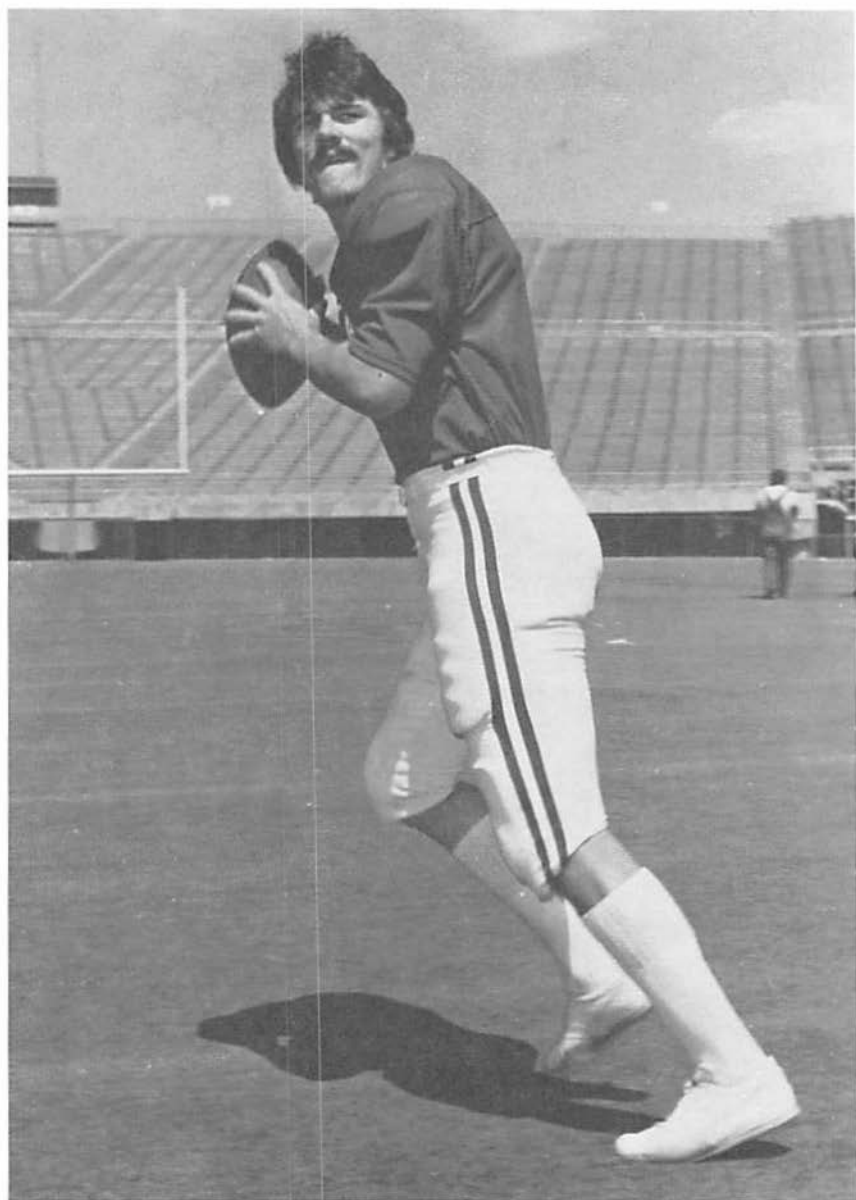


Ardell Johnson, Nebraska cornerback

Ritch Bahe, Nebraska wingback

The Gators looked upon the battle as a chance for them to gain national prestige. "Nebraska is a household word in college football," said one of their coaches. "The only opponent I can compare with them is Alabama a year ago, and Nebraska is definitely in their class."

For the Cornhuskers it was a chance to tie a national record of six straight bowl victories set by Georgia Tech in 1952-57. Nebraska's string had started with a 45-6 trouncing of Georgia in the Sun Bowl at the conclusion of the 1969 season. Then came a 17-12 victory over LSU in the 1971 Orange Bowl, a 38-6 trouncing of Alabama in the 1972 Orange Bowl, a 40-6 lacing of Notre Dame in the 1973 Orange Bowl, and a 19-3 win over Texas in the 1974 Cotton Bowl.



• Terry Luck, Nebraska quarterback



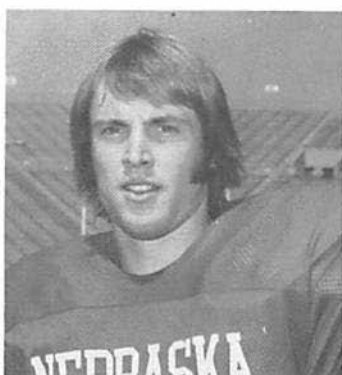
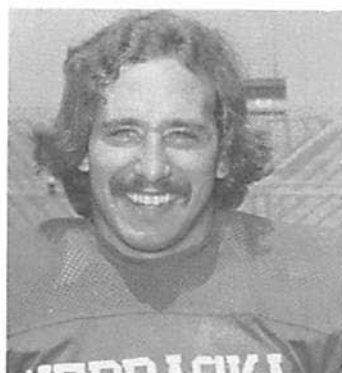
1975 Sugar Bowl — Tom Osborne cheers as Nebraska intercepts a Florida pass.

The Sugar Bowl was a miniature of the Huskers' season, but in reverse. Florida's running game dominated until midway in the third quarter. With the Gators leading 10-0 they rushed to a first down at the Huskers' 5-yard line. But the defense rose up and forced them to turn the ball over at the one. From there Terry Luck, the backup quarterback that Osborne had been looking for all season, came in to take over from Humm, who had suffered his worst day in football—only two completions in twelve throws for 16 yards and four interceptions.

All Luck did was drive his team, behind the running of fullback Davis, the entire length of the field for a touchdown to move the Huskers into striking position. Davis broke loose for a 20-yard run to set up the tying field goal, a 37-yard boot, by soccer-style kicker Mike Coyle, and then with under two minutes to play Davis exploded for 40 yards to the Gators' 31-yard line to set up Coyle's game-winning field goal with 1:46 to play. Nebraska won it, 13-10.

Even the kick was a nail-biter all the way. "I didn't think the last one was good," said Coyle, the guy who had sent the ball on its way.

"It looked right, but it had that famous Coyle hook on it and faded right over the posts. I've never had two bigger kicks in my life."



1974 Nebraska starters. Top: Tom Ruud, Bob Nelson, Wonder Monds. Bottom: Mark Heydorff, George Kyros, Bob Martin.

"When we held and then went 99 yards, that was it," said Coach Osborne, who had been the victim of the reverse of that fortune for his only three losses of the season.

Hold and score. That's what it is all about. Stop the other fellow but don't let him stop you. They are the lessons of life, as well as football, that Coach Tom Osborne is teaching his players. And as long as he brings that same dedication and personal sense of discipline to the game, Nebraska football will continue to be that fine representative of American sports next season and next and next and next. For as long as there is college football.

Appendix: Nebraska's Annual Won-Lost Record

Nebraska's Annual Won-Lost Record

Year	Won	Lost	Tied	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Coach
1890	2	0	0	1.000	28	0	None
1891	2	2	0	.500	72	40	None
1892	2	2	1	.500	21	40	None
1893	3	2	1	.583	80	76	Frank Crawford
1894	6	2	0	.750	134	48	Frank Crawford
1895	6	3	0	.667	138	62	Charles Thomas
1896	6	3	1	.650	102	64	E. N. Robinson
1897	5	1	0	.833	80	15	E. N. Robinson
1898	7	4	0	.636	232	102	Fielding Yost
1899	2	7	1	.250	49	164	A. E. Branch
1900	7	1	1	.833	129	20	Walter C. Booth
1901	7	2	0	.778	166	52	Walter C. Booth
1902	10	0	0	1.000	187	0	Walter C. Booth
1903	11	0	0	1.000	292	16	Walter C. Booth
1904	8	3	0	.727	310	52	Walter C. Booth
1905	9	2	0	.818	316	114	Walter C. Booth
1906	6	4	0	.600	164	73	Amos Foster
1907	8	2	0	.800	323	69	W. C. Cole
1908	7	2	1	.750	165	93	W. C. Cole
1909	3	3	2	.500	66	53	W. C. Cole
1910	7	1	0	.875	260	36	W. C. Cole
1911	5	1	2	.750	281	33	E. O. Stiehm
1912	7	1	0	.875	240	37	E. O. Stiehm
1913	8	0	0	1.000	138	28	E. O. Stiehm
1914	7	0	1	.938	174	28	E. O. Stiehm
1915	8	0	0	1.000	282	39	E. O. Stiehm
1916	6	2	0	.750	145	51	E. J. Stewart
1917	5	2	0	.714	228	33	E. J. Stewart
1918	2	3	1	.417	53	55	W. G. Kline
1919	3	3	2	.500	56	60	Henry F. Schulte
1920	5	3	1	.611	151	84	Henry F. Schulte
1921	7	1	0	.875	283	17	Fred T. Dawson
1922	7	1	0	.875	276	28	Fred T. Dawson
1923	4	2	2	.625	112	71	Fred T. Dawson
1924	5	3	0	.625	118	77	Fred T. Dawson
1925	4	2	2	.625	69	29	E. E. Bearg
1926	6	2	0	.750	123	46	E. E. Bearg
1927	6	2	0	.750	211	59	E. E. Bearg
1928	7	1	1	.833	144	31	E. E. Bearg
1929	4	1	3	.688	93	62	D. X. Bible
1930	4	3	2	.556	119	61	D. X. Bible
1931	8	2	0	.800	136	82	D. X. Bible
1932	7	1	1	.833	105	52	D. X. Bible
1933	8	1	0	.889	138	19	D. X. Bible

Nebraska's Annual Won-Lost Record

Year	Won	Lost	Tied	Pct.	Pts.	Opp.	Coach
1934	6	3	0	.667	106	89	D. X. Bible
1935	6	2	1	.722	138	71	D. X. Bible
1936	7	2	0	.778	185	49	D. X. Bible
1937	6	1	2	.778	99	42	L. McC. Jones
1938	3	5	1	.389	68	84	L. McC. Jones
1939	7	1	1	.833	115	70	L. McC. Jones
1940	8	2	0	.800	183	75	L. McC. Jones
1941	4	5	0	.444	93	81	L. McC. Jones
1942	3	7	0	.300	55	158	Glenn Presnell
1943	2	6	0	.250	79	261	A. J. Lewandowski
1944	2	6	0	.250	83	210	A. J. Lewandowski
1945	4	5	0	.444	145	200	George Clark
1946	3	6	0	.333	126	161	Bernie Masterson
1947	2	7	0	.222	73	191	Bernie Masterson
1948	2	8	0	.200	137	273	George Clark
1949	4	5	0	.444	124	172	Bill Glassford
1950	6	2	1	.722	267	217	Bill Glassford
1951	2	8	0	.200	116	253	Bill Glassford
1952	5	4	1	.550	173	123	Bill Glassford
1953	3	6	1	.350	119	184	Bill Glassford
1954	6	5	0	.545	233	202	Bill Glassford
1955	5	5	0	.500	127	176	Bill Glassford
1956	4	6	0	.400	125	206	Pete Elliott
1957	1	9	0	.100	67	243	Bill Jennings
1958	3	7	0	.300	71	235	Bill Jennings
1959	4	6	0	.400	108	160	Bill Jennings
1960	4	6	0	.400	95	164	Bill Jennings
1961	3	6	1	.350	119	135	Bill Jennings
1962	9	2	0	.818	293	161	Bob Devaney
1963	10	1	0	.909	273	114	Bob Devaney
1964	9	2	0	.818	256	85	Bob Devaney
1965	10	1	0	.909	349	129	Bob Devaney
1966	9	2	0	.818	223	118	Bob Devaney
1967	6	4	0	.600	127	83	Bob Devaney
1968	6	4	0	.600	155	161	Bob Devaney
1969	9	2	0	.818	254	119	Bob Devaney
1970	11	0	1	.958	426	189	Bob Devaney
1971	13	0	0	1.000	507	104	Bob Devaney
1972	9	2	1	.792	501	97	Bob Devaney
1973	9	2	1	.792	327	163	Tom Osborne
1974	9	3	0	.750	373	132	Tom Osborne
Totals	491	249	38	.656	14,461	8,411	

(continued from front flap)

Illustrated with 80 photographs (including one of every All-American player in the school's history), *The Cornhuskers* tells the whole story of Nebraska football in words and pictures, even including the "football madness" that descends on Lincoln when the Huskers play at home and the literally thousands of Big Red fans who follow the team on the road.

The Nebraska tradition of big-time football on the plains makes *The Cornhuskers* required reading not only for alumni and fans but also for all students of college football today.

David Israel covered college football for the *Chicago Daily News*. He is presently a sports columnist for the *Washington Star-News*. General Editor **George Vass**, author of (among other works) *George Halas and the Chicago Bears*, is a journalist/sportswriter for the *Chicago Daily News*.

Other titles available in the
Illustrated College Football Series
(General Editor: George Vass)

THE TROJANS
Southern California Football

THE BUCKEYES
Ohio State Football

THE CRIMSON TIDE
Alabama Football

Henry Regnery Company
Chicago

Cover photograph by Malcolm W. Emmons
Cover design by Frank Noto

ISBN: 0-8092-8180-5

